

THE INDIAN STAGE

Vol. II. (1)

Revised Edition

Dr. HEMENDRA NATH DAS GUPTA

First Girish Ghose Lecturer

Calcutta University.

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THE INDIAN STAGE

Vol. II

[Revised Edition]

AND

Synopsis of Vol. III

By

Dr. HEMENDRANATH DAS GUPTA

First Girish Ghose Lecturer, Calcutta University, Author
of 'Bankim Chandra', 'Girish Chandra', 'Girish-
Prativa', 'Deshabandhu', 'Subhas Chandra',
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PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

Dr. Johan Van Manen, the great Oriental Scholar of international reputation, wrote a masterly preface to the first volume of this book worthy of his erudition and culture. For the other volumes, my readers' appreciation and sympathy will form the best "Fore-word."

The first volume of 'The Indian Stage' deals with Natyasastra, Sanskrit Dramas, Yatras and the English Theatres of Eighteenth and early Nineteenth Century (specially the Chowringhee and Sansouci Theatres) which contributed to the rise and development of the Bengali Stage. The present volume deals with earliest Bengali Dramas and brings us to the rise of Girish Chandra Ghose and the passing of the Dramatic Performances Act in 1876.

Since this volume was first published, I have lost a number of helpful friends whose deaths have dealt a severe blow to me. Besides the erudite scholar Mr. Sachchidananda Bhattacharjee to whom I owe much for

my literary activities and Mr. Devendranath Bose who gave the first inspiration, I feel keenly the absence of Mr. Kshetra Mohon Mitra, a distinguished actor whose constant company served me as the best association for the Stage and my esteemed friend Mr. Makhanlal Sen (Author of Ramayana) who used to assist me in the arduous work.

Amongst others, I feel also the loss of Nityā Charyas Amritlal Bose, Aparesh Mukherjee, Surendra Nath Ghose (Dani Babu) and last though not least Chunilal Dev.

Amongst the living persons, many have helped me and I express my heartiest gratefulness to those friends and wellwishers.

HEMENDRANATH DAS GUPTA

124/5B Russa Road,

Calcutta,

The 16th June, 1946

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THE INDIAN STAGE

Vol. II

I. THE EARLY BENGALI PLAYS

We have seen from the preceding volume that though the revival of the Drama in Bengal dates from the time of Śrī Chaitanya, direct impetus to the modern Bengali stage was, however, given by the early English Theatres of Calcutta, of which the Chowringhee Theatre stood the most prominent. This historic house exercised a great deal of influence upon the educated community of the Hindu citizens of Calcutta and its principal patron in its evil days was the late Prince Dwarka Nath Tagore. The Yātrās, on the other hand, that were the main source of popular entertainment, fell into decline on account of their degenerating into low taste and high erotic tune. This caused indeed a great loss to the country, for in the absence of other mediums, the Yātrās were a kind of popular institution for the spread of mass education. Really with disappearance of the Yātrās, many good things were lost to Bengal.

The introduction of dramatic performances in the place of the ancient Yātrās was to a great extent due to the spirit of the time. Bengal was then passing through a phase of rapid changes. The leaven of the western civilisation entered into Bengali life and it rapidly attacked the Bengali society both for good and bad. Yātrās, too, degenerated into vulgar shows, and educated minds discountenanced those altogether. Thus when first the Hindu Theatre was opened at the house of Babu Prasanna Kumar Tagore, "Reformer" writing in the *Calcutta Journal*, January, 1832 (pp. 6-7), was jubilant at the resuscitation of the Hindu Theatre, as will be evident from the following quotation from that Journal :—

"What child of enlightenment, what men of patriotic feelings will not hail with raptures of joy that day when our hitherto degraded countrymen will turn their backs with disgust against the gross, barbarous and obscene performance of Cobies and Yātrās to relieve their aching heart by the sign of a rational and dignified performance on the stage of our Hindu Theatre?"

Raja Ram Mohan, too, at about the time boldly attacked the huge mass of superstitions accumulated through centuries of slavery and national degeneracy. He reformed the language, held up the lofty religious cult of Upanisads and banished from the land many shameful practices and atrocious crimes that were perpetrated in the name of religion. The great reformer was

followed by a host of capable apostles of light, and their names are the proud legacy of that eventful time. Religion, morality, politics, literature and art came under the pitiless glare of critical inquiry and much filth and dirt were removed to help a healthy national growth. In this all-embracing movement for national regeneration, drama replaced the ancient Yātrās. Many notable persons of that time lent their hands in this particular department of poetic art. Even men like Keshav Chandra Sen, Pratap Chandra Mazumder, Narendra Nath Sen, W. C. Bonerjee, Michael Madhusudan Dutt, and Rajendra Lal Mitra took active part in dramatic performance, each one an intellectual force of Bengal, not to speak of the deathless glory which Keshav Sen reaped as a religious preacher. Even the aristocracy did not lag behind ; many cultured and wealthy citizens of Calcutta worked for the uplift of the people and drama received great patronage in their hands. No civilised nation can do without its drama, and it was only natural for such intellectual giants like Madhusudan, and Keshav Chandra to espouse the popular cause. Bengali drama was thus in a stage of development and we would better treat the subject in its chronological order.

The pioneer in introducing dramatic performances in Bengali, as we have already seen, was Lebedeff, who with his worthy co-adjutor Golak Nath Dass, staged in 1795, a Bengali play

for the entertainment of the Bengali audience but time drew a veil of oblivion over their noble efforts, though they surely deserve grateful tribute of Bengal. The man who next took up this cause was Nobin Krishna Bose, who staged Bharat Chandra's *Vidya-sundar* in his residential house at Shyambazar in 1832. In the interval between Lebedeff's enterprise and Nabin Babu's Theatre there were exhortations in the *Samacharachandrika* and occasionally by others for dramatic performance in Bengali, but they went unheeded, though almost every educated man of that time felt the want of a Bengali Stage. It was only in 1831 that the liberal and enlightened Zeminder Prasanna Kumar Tagore with his colleagues started the Hindu Theatre for the entertainment of the Bengali audience. But the plays acted there were all in English. Nabin Babu's Theatre was really the first genuine endeavour for the performance of Bengali drama, after a lapse of about thirtyeight years from Lebedeff's ! After Nabin Babu's Theatre, the Bengali students and actors again reverted to English plays and the Oriental Theatre staged English plays for the entertainment of the educated Bengalees. But with time at last there grew an anxious craving for the Bengali plays.

BENGALI DRAMA.

In the preceding volume we have mentioned one or two Bengali Plays, but we shall now

trace the growth of the mórdern Bengali Drama from its old Sanskrit model to its present westernised type. Attempts were at first made to write Bengali dramas after Sanskrit style. But since such plays did not meet with public approval, the Sanskrit model was given up and was replaced by the western ideal.

The growth of the Bengali Drama is really interesting, for in the beginning the attempts were only crude. The most noticeable attempt to write a Bengali Drama was that by Bharat Chandra, the famous poet of the *Vidyasundar*. It was he who first thought of introducing Bengali dialogues and Bengali characters in a Bengali drama. He commenced the drama (1) *Chandi* shortly before his death. In the opening verse or Nāndī, the Sūtradhāra eulogises the virtues of the poet's patron, Raja Krishna Chandra of Krishnanagore, a Bengali Zeminder of repute who lived at the time of the Battle of Plassey. The characters of the drama are Goddess Chandī, Her enemy Mahisāsura and the Prajā or the people.

The Sūtradhara speaks in Sanskrit, but his wife, Natī, replies in Bengali, as a woman does in Prakrit in a Sanskrit drama. Goddess Chandī, the demon Mahisāsura and other characters speak in Bengali. But even their Bengali dialogues contain an excessive mixture of Sanskrit, Hindi and Persian words, so much so, that it is very difficult to decipher the meaning. The poet died before the play was completed.

One cannot too much regret the loss, for it was the first attempt after a Bengali drama by the greatest poet of that time. This is the fragment of the *first* drama that we possess, in which Bengali for the first time was used and was written about the year 1760.

After a lapse of about twenty years, there was another attempt to write a drama in Bengali by a Sanskrit scholar, Pandit Vidyanath Vachaspati Bhattacharya of Nadia. The name of the drama is (2) *Chitrayajna*. It is the *second* instance of an attempt to write a drama in Bengali.

Though Babu Kaliprasanna Sinha calls it a Sanskrit Drama*, H. H. Wilson considers it a heterogeneous composition. It was composed about the year 1778. "It is so far valuable," says Wilson† "as conveying a notion of the sort of attempts at dramatic composition made by the present race of Hindus in Bengal. The Yātrās or Jātrās which are occasionally represented in the Bengali language follow the plan of *Chitrayajna* with still less pretensions to a literary character. They are precisely the Improvista Comedia of the Italians, the business alone being

* Vide preface to *Vikramorvasi* translated in Bengali about the year 1857, under the auspices of "Vidyotsahini Sabha." It speaks of *Chitrayajna*, written about 80 years ago.

† Vide Wilson's "The Theatre of the Hindus", Appendix.

sketched by the author and the whole of the dialogue supplied by the actors. The dialogue is diversified by songs which are written and learnt by heart. Some improvement, however, has been made of late years, in the representation of the performance ; the details of the story are more faithfully and minutely followed and part of the dialogue is composed and taught by the author to the actors."

(3) The third noticeable attempt was that of Lebedeff in 1795 and we have made extensive reference to the translation of *Disguise* and its representation on the stage in Vol. I, pages 219-258 (First Edition).

(4) It is believed that Shakespeare's *Tempest* was translated into Bengali by Mr. Monckton in 1809. There is no evidence of its being staged, nor a copy of the work has been found or described any where.

(5) We next hear of a farcical comic piece *Kalirajar Jatra* which was played in 1821. The *Samvadakaumudi* a vernacular paper edited by Raja Ram Mohan Roy in its issue No. VIII of 1821 mentions a drama named *Kalirajar Jatra* (which to convey the spirit of the drama, may be translated as the "Journey of Mephistoples"). Unfortunately, a copy of this journal could not be found, but we have from the *Calcutta Review* of 1850 (Vol. XIII page 160) the following that "a new drama, *Kalirajar Jatra* is being performed."

The word "Jātrā" has, however, raised some misconceptions in the minds of some critics who hold, it was not a drama. The *Samvada-kaumudi* describes the play as a comedy. The *Calcutta Review* calls it "drama". Jātrā here does not mean "the musical opera" but only 'journey', as has been amply shown in the following account given in English in the September issue of the *Asiatic Journal*, 1822 which derived its information from the Bengali paper, the *Samvadakaumudi* :

"A descriptive account of a drama newly invented and of the characters personated in it. It is denominated the "Colly Raja's Jatra". It was stated in a former number that when a full account of the comedy was received it should be laid before the public. It is composed of various actors who are well-versed in the act of "Singing and dancing." The following is the order of their appearance on the stage. First, two Baistambas ; second, the Kaliraj ; third, the Vizier ; fourth, the preceptor ; fifth, a noble and well-dressed Englishman "Just come from Chattogram" with a lady ; sixth, the only manservant and maid-servant of this young gentleman. In the last scene when all these are assembled, they began to dance and sing with a voice as melodious as that of the Cuckoo, talk witty things and thus excite the laughter and put into rapture those Babus who assembled there from different quarters and some of whom are very much interested that in process of time this comedy will become very popular."

No doubt Yātrās were in vogue at that time and *Samacharadarpan*, the missionary paper of Serampore of 26th Jan. 1822 called it a musical opera—"Natoon Jātrā", but here 'Jātrā' evidently refers to the journey of the Kalirāj from Chittagong to Calcutta and it is doubtful if the editor of *Darpan* saw the performance. A similar idea is found in Pandit Khirode Prasad Vidyavinode's *Dada O Didi* staged in 1907, a play since put under ban by the Government. In a subsequent play as *Khasdakhal* by the veteran comedian, late lamented Babu Amrita Lal Bose, we find Kali * directing his steps towards Calcutta where, he says, a good many of his institutions have thrived. The above piece was really not a Yātrā and Raja Ram Mohan, too, would not have called it a drama, if it really were not so. Besides, the only kind of Yātrā in vogue at that time was the *Krisna Yatra*, or *Nala-Damayanti* Yātrā or the like and there is hardly any tradition preserved in Bengal about a Yātrā in which Kali figures as a character. On the other hand, people had commenced to feel a liking for English theatres.

(6) That similar light dramas were at that time represented, may be gathered from the

* Kali is the evil genius of this age, who like a second Lucifer delights in leading men astray in perverse ways which ultimately lead to their destruction.

† (A. J. Sept. 1822.)

same number of the *Asiatic Journal*, borrowing facts from the *Samvakaumudi* of 1822 in its issue V. The significant lines occur there :

“Letter from a correspondent pointing out the immoral and evil tendencies of dramas or plays recently invented and performed by a number of youngmen and recommending their suppression.”

It is not possible to find out what and of what type those dramas were. Obviously, they were not dramas of good taste. Most likely, they were farcical comedies or Satirical plays but certainly they were not Yātrās as treated of Krisna and Gopis, Nala and Damayanti or, at later stage, of Vidyā and Sundara.

(7) The *Calcutta Journal* speaks of a new book, a translation from English of William Franklin's *Comroopa* by Babu Jagamohan Bose of Bhowanipur, who from the above work again published a comedy denominated *The Comroopa Yatra*. The comedy was performed on Saturday night, the 9th March 1822, at the house of Shyāmsundar Sarkar of the same place.* This too was not a Yātrā but meant journey to Comroopa.

(8) We have noticed Krisna Misra's *Probodhachandrodaya Natak* in Sanskrit at page 70 Vol. I. of this book. A Bengali translation of the drama was published in the year 1822 under the name of *Atmatattvakaumudi*, the translators

* *Calcutta Journal* Vol. II, No. 76, p. 309, 1822.

being Kashinath Tarkapanchanan, Gadadhar Nyayaratna and Ramkinkar Siromani. It was in 6 Acts. There is a mention of this book in the catalogue of books in the British Museum also. † It is an instance of the early attempt of the Hindus to bring out only translations of Sanskrit dramas. It was also really admirable to publish drama at a time when a section of the people was fond of very light shows. It was priced at Rs. 2/- and printed at the Chandrika Press. (Vide, *Samacaracandrikā* of 1831, 2nd May).

(9) Rev. J. Long in his catalogue of 1100 Bengali books, published in 1852, speaks of :

(i) *Hasyarnava*, a farce written in 1822.

We have not got a copy of this, but would supply our readers with an English translation of the review by Rajendra Lal Mitra in his *Vividharthasangraha* of Chait, 1780 (Saka) :

“Under the cover of a dramatic piece, foolish lustful King, avaricious minister, ignorant physician, cowardly soldiers have all been severely dealt with ; though it is laughable and short, it is not received with regards owing to the obscenity it exhibited.”

† Vide, Dr. Jayantakumar Das Gupta's article "Some early dramas in Bengal" in the *Advance*, dated 10th April, 1932, which runs as follows :—"Schuyler's Bibliography of the Sanskrit Drama and the British Museum Literary Catalogue, Bengali Books (1883) mentions a Bengali paraphrase of Krisna Misra's famous drama *Prabodhacandrodaya* published in 1822.

(ii) *Kautukasarvasva Natak*, a better drama than the above. Both are, however, translations from original Sanskrit pieces. The *Asiatic Journal* of Sept. 1822 might have referred to dramas of this nature.

Rev. Long has mentioned *Kautukasarvasva Natak* as a drama by R. Chundra Tarkalankar of Harinavi.

Zenker described it "Drama in Bengali per R. Chundra Tarkalankar de Harinavi." Both Long and Zenker put the date as 1830. Blimhardt in his catalogue of Bengali books in the British Museum Library (1866) speaks of the *Kautukasarvasva Natak*, by Gopinath Chakrabarty as *Kali. Vatsarajar Upakhyan* based on thory of Kali-Vatsa-rajā, a Sanskrit play with intervening portions appearing in a Bengali version in prose and verse by Ram Chandra Tarkalankar in 1828. The *Samacaracandrika* of May 1831 referred to this drama as well as *Prabodhacandrodaya Natak* as ready for sale in the office with price of Re. I. Pandit Gopinath, author of the original, composed this drama for performance in the house of some wealthy citizen. It is a two-act play opening with an invocation to Ganesa in *tripadi* verse. H. H. Wilson in his *Theatre of the Hindus* wrote of the Sanskrit original as "a satire upon princes who addict themselves to idleness and do not patronise the Brahmins." The language of the translation is commonplace and is often a mixture of the high-sounding and vulgar. There

are many stanzas in *Payar* and *Tripadi* verse. The translator calls his language *Sadhabhasa*. Some people, specially the fictitious Dhanajay Mukherjee in a brochure entitled *Vangiya Natyasala* published by Babu Nalini Ranjan Pandit (Page 2, line 15) has confused this drama with Vidyasundar just as Lebedeff's *Disguise* has been similarly confused in the *Visvakosa*.*

'Dhurta Nartaka' and 'Dhurta Samagama' are similar farces in Bengali translated from Sanskrit.

(10) Next, we have *Vidyasundar* (of Bhârât Chandra) acted at Nabin Babu's house in the years (1831-1835) but its importance lies in that it was an original Bengali work acted on the stage. It shows the hankering of a philanthropically disposed Bengali to try anything good in his mother tongue in preference to English or Sanskrit or mixed drama.

We have shown how the scenes were all realistic and passages of the book used to be read by one before any scene was exhibited.

(11) Long's Catalogue of Bengli books mentions two dramas, viz, Kâlidâsa's *Sakuntala* translated and published by Sj. Râmtarak Bhattacherya in 1840 and *Ratnavai*, a

* Vide *Rangalaya*, Vol. 16 and observations of the *Indian Stage*, Vol. I, page 222.

1. See Vo. 1. *Indian Stage* pp. 285-294 First Edition.

2. See also *Samvadprabhakar*, 28th June 1842.

Sanskrit drama by Harsa-Vardhan, king of Kashmira rendered into Bengali by Nilmani Pal in 1849.

(12) We have given an idea of mixed or translated dramas, but hitherto we have not come across a single Bengali drama in purity. The first genuine drama is however *Kirtibilas* by Jogendra Chandra Gupta in 1852. This preceded even *Bhadrarjoon* by Tara Charan Sikdar which has hitherto been considered by eminent writers like Mr. Justice Sarada Charan Mitra, Babu Sarat Chandra Ghosal and others as the first Bengali drama. But *Bhadrarjoon* also has a historical significance and we shall describe both these dramas rather in detail.

Rev. Long published this in his catalogue of Bengali Dramas with the following descriptions :—

Kirtibilas—recently composed, printed and published under the permission of Vidyamvada Sabha a drama in five acts by G. C. Gupta, with 70 pages price 12 as. Subject—A king's son near the Jumna committed suicide* owing to the cruelties of his stepmother. The book shows considerable talent."

This is also the first tragedy and the language, influenced by Pandit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, is chaste though not easy. *Kirtibilas*, the hero of the piece, was the son of an old king Chandrakanta who under the

* There is no indication of this in the drama.

influence of his young unchaste wife ordered the pious prince to be exiled and put to death. The unfortunate prince had much good instructions from his friend Meghnath. The fate of a lustful courtier Prannath has also been shown.

As usual there is Sutradhar and Nati and the Nandi (benidictory verse) is very beautiful. It runs thus :

“Pray to Him, who has created us,
Saved us and is all merciful.”

The title-page mentions the book being printed in 1851 and we have corroboration of this in the drama being mentioned in “Sambad Prabhakar of May 28, 1852.”

(1) Next to Kirtibilas may be mentioned the much-talked-of Drama *Bhadrarjoon* from the pen of Tara Charan Sikdar a teacher of Hindu School and containing the story how Arjoon, the third Pandava-prince carried away Bhadra (Subhadra, the sister of Krishna). Tara Charan writes in the preface that various Sanskrit dramas had been translated into Bengali, and that actors in those days expressed their thoughts in songs and that jesters excited the

* In the title-page of the book is mentioned the following :—

Mamaishâ Bhagini Pârtha
Sârangasya Sahodarâ
Subhadra nâma bhadram te
Piturme Dayita Suta

Kalikata Chaitanya Chandrodaya Yantre Mudrita
Sakabda 1774.

audience to laughter on unnecessary occasions. The author has avoided these vagaries, but there is no evidence of the drama being staged.

Although, next to the author of *Kirtibilas*, Taracharan has however made a new departure in the dramatic mode which was subsequently followed by almost all the dramatists of Bengal. He avoided the classical convention of introducing *Prologue* and *Epilogue*. In Bhadrarjoon, there is neither the Sutradhara nor Nandi nor similar dramatic devices that are indispensable to a Sanskrit play. Nor do we find any Vidushaka or professional jester in the drama. Michael Madhusudan Dutt, the great Bengali poet who composed his *Sarmistha* seven years after this, wrote to his friend Raj Narayan Bose that in writing dramas he would not allow himself to be bound by the rules of Sanskrit Rhetoric, but would look to the great dramatists of Europe for his models. Taracharan Sikdar who preceded even Michael in shaking off the Sanskrit model, deserves all praise for his literary courage in rising above the formalities of a dead language, which would have certainly impeded the varied growth of the Bengali Drama. It must not be forgotten that the first Bengali Dramatist who introduced the innovation was Babu Tara Charan Sikdar and not the great Madhusudan though the latter by the wealth of his imagination and vigour of style, has completely cast the pigmy reformer into oblivion and might

not have known his predecessor or heard about his drama at all. Tara Charan writes in the preface :—

“The book has been written in quite a new style. Hence we think it necessary to give some idea of it in brief. In its dramatic action and situation this drama is after European model but there is no departure from the old style of composition in prose and poetry. I have done away with certain characters of the Sanskrit drama, e.g. Nāndi, Sutrādhār and Nati, on the stage by way of prelude, nor have I inserted the character of Vidushaka. For scene the word “Samyogasthal” has been used.”

There is another great innovation in Sikdar's drama. The speeches were no doubt written in prose, but rhyming doggrels, both short and long, were now and again put into the mouths of the actors.

Subhadra is a favourite theme with our poets and writers. Madhusudan wrote an unfinished drama of the name in English. Nabin Chandra's conception of Subhadra in *Raibatak* and *Curukshetra* was full of grandeur, and Bankim Chandra, too, was obsessed with her ideal in *Bishabriksha*. Subhadra is also a prominent character of Girish Chandra's *Pandava Gouravo*. So the topic of the drama in question was a popular one, but there was no action in it, and though Bhima's anger Baladeva's pride and Nārada's quarrelsome spirit were shown, Droupadi was given a minor place

and no individuality was traceable in Satyabhama or Rukmini, amongst the female characters.

The composition, however, is common place but the style is easy. Conversations, though sometimes bordering on rusticity are true to domestic life. But the main defect lies in the abundance of poems in dialogues. There is however no indecency of taste, inspite of the language being rustic * at times.

(14) Contemporary with Kirtibilas and Bhadrarjoon may be mentioned another drama *Bhanumatir Chittavilas* which was also well spoken of at the time. This was in reality a Bengali rendering of "Merchant of Venice," Bhanumati being a replica of Portia, with Sulochana and Susila as her attendants and the scene shifting from Ujjain to Guzrat. There is a benedictory verse (Nāndi), a hymn to Saraswati and an attempt to please courtiers by an ode to vernal pleasures. For Acts and Scenes, the author uses the words Anka and Anga.

Rev. Long puts it "Translation with adaptations, well and ably done." As translation, it loses the originality of Gupta or Sikdar but the author Babu Hara Chandra Ghose of Babugunge, Hooghly, was a scholar with much literary attainments and it was creditable that he tried to remodel western stories into Bengali at a

* Mr. Jogendra nath Bose calls 'Kadarjya' (not cultured)

time when there was still in the country a bias for Sanskrit plays.

Hara Chandra himself said that the work met with appreciation and emboldened him to write his next drama 'Kourava Bijoya Natak'. Hara Chandra was at one time considered as the first dramatist of his race. In early Sept. 1909 one Mr. K. B. Dutt put a query in the 'Indian Daily News' as to who was the first dramatist of Bengal. Our esteemed friend Mr. Kiran Chandra Dutt sent a reply on the 9th September in the same paper affirming that the author of Bhadrarjoon was the first dramatist. A correspondent signing himself as 'Old man' contradicted him on the 24th Sept., saying that Hara Chandra Ghose of Hooghly who was the recipient of the Auckland prize in golden and silver watches in Mohsin's Hooghly college in 1840 for a lucid translation of Bacon's 'Truth,' published his "Bhanumatir Chittavilas" in 1850. Then came further news on the 27th September from 'One who knows' that the drama was published in 1842.

None of the above dates was accurate. We get the first reference of the drama in Poush number of Pravakar of 1260 B.S. corresponding to December 1853 (18 months after Kirtibilas was mentioned in the same paper) in the following way :

"A novel drama (Abhinava Natak) by Babu Hara Chandra Ghose, Superintendent of Excoise Maldah, written on the principles of English

dramas (Imraginataker Rityanusāre) has been published." In the preface to the next drama also—'Kaurava Vijaya Nataka' the author himself states :

"In 1852 I published my vernacular drama of the Merchant of Venice which was written at the suggestion of a European friend of native education and the work met with much appreciation".

Thus we find, of the three original Bengali dramas of the time really the first of their kind, Kirtibilash was the earliest and of the remaining two, Bhadrarjoon undoubtedly preceded the other.

Rev. Long in his catalogue of Bengali books also mentions a drama called 'Mahanataka' i.e Ram Chandra's history dramatised in 1849 by Pandit Ramgati Nyayaratna and translated into English by Raja Kali Krishna. That this was not possibly a Yatra piece but a drama, is clear from the fact that Mr. Long gave separate lists of Yatras and Nātakas. We have not however come across with a work of this nature.

Some literary men including Rai Bahadoor Dinesh Chandra Sen put 'Prem Nataka' by Babu Panchanan Banerjee of Shyampukur, Calcutta, as being the first Bengali Drama. We have since come across two compositions of Mr. Banerjee viz: Prem Nataka and Ramani Nataka printed respectively in 1853 and 1848, but these are simply kābyas (poems) and not dramas,

composed in Tripadi and payar metres. There are no dramatic characters, nor any dialogues. The compositions too displayed bad taste with an abundance of Adi-rasa, as the names suggest.

Rev. Long mentions Chaitanya Chandrodaya Natak or Chaitanya's history dramatised translated by Prem Das in 1853, price Re. 1/8 from Paramananda Sen's drama of the name. No copy was however traceable,

(15) 'Bodhendu Vikas Natak'. We have, however, in our possession, a work Bodhendu Vikas Natak which may be considered a drama. This was from the pen of no other person than the most popular writer of the time, the poet Iswar Chandra Gupta, whose illustrious pupils were the great Bankim Chandra Chatterjee and dramatists Dinabandhu Mitra and Monomohan Bose. It was published in Prabhakara in 1260 B. S. (corresponding to 1853 A.D) and though written on sanskrit model, we have both dialogue and songs in it. It is an imitation of the Sanskrit play called Prabodh Chandrodaya Natak and the characters are Madan, Rati, Vivek etc. The drama was completed, says the great Bankim, and after his death in 1265 B. S. his brother Ramchandra brought out in 1859 the first part (with price of Re.1/8/-) from the portion that had been published in Prabhakara. The rest has not upto now seen the light of the day. The drama contained many scenes and though some of the songs were excellent, its dialogues are not interesting. We have it on

the authority of the dramatist Monomohan Bose that rehearsals of Bodhendu Vikas continued with great eclat, large sums of money were spent for it but "no good came out of it except the recounting of songs on Hari (Vishnu)*. Rehearsals were in progress as a correspondent of the Hurkaru says really—

"Probodha Chandrodaya will be acted at a private theatre in a gentleman's house in Calcutta. It is a clever drama, but is utterly unfit for the stage. A number of metaphysical dialogues can hardly interest the majority of those who seek amusement from those representations".†

The idea of staging the drama was however given up, probably, as was apprehended it would not meet with the approbation of the audience.

Some people confound this drama with Probodh Chandrodaya as translated, mentioned in page 10. But this is not so. The idea might have been taken from Probodh Chandrodaya, but it is a separate drama under the name of Bodhendu Bikash.

Another drama "Kali" by the same author Iswar Chandra Gupta is also a similarly unfinished work.

* "Vide the Bengali Journal Madhyastha (Pous, 1280 B. S) which contains the lecture of the editor Monomohan Bose during the first Anniversary of the National Theatre, as President on Dec 7, 1873.

† Hurkaru 21st May 1857, and Hindu Patriot. 28th May 1857

16. *Kulinkulasarvasva Natak.*

From the list we have given above, no work except Kirtibilas and Bhadrarjoon would interest the readers as an original dramatic piece. But even these two works were not ever put on the stage, and the attempt, however praise-worthy, was rather crude. The most important drama of the time, however, which may really be called the first Bengali Drama was "Kulin Kulasarvasva" by Pandit Ram Narayan Tarkaratna of Harinabhi, 24 Parganas.

It was not a translation, nor was the idea borrowed from anything, and has been highly spoken of by contemporary journalists and men of culture. Its origin is very interesting. Babu Kali Charan Chaturdhurin a Zemindar of Rangpur, North Bengal, announced in 1853 in (1) the Bhaskar edited by Gouri Sankar Bhattacharjee (popularly known as "Gurgude Bhattacharjee" on account of his short dwarfish physique) and in (2) Rangpur-Vartavaba, that a prize of Rs. 50/- would be given to the author of the best drama on the evils of Kulinism introduced in the country by Vallal Sen. It was at this time that the educated people were awakened to the social abuses eating into the vitals of the Hindu society and Kulinism was one such evil. One man, and very often an old man took to fifty, sixty and hundred wives and not un-often a number of brides of ages varying from ten to sixty were married at the same

lagna (auspicious moment for the marriage), the Kulin husband accepting a dowery in each case and not again coming a second time to these wives. Ram Narain Tarkaratna (afterwards popularly known as *Natuke Ram Naran*), who wrote the drama *Kulinkulasarvasva*, won the prize. It aimed at eradicating the social and moral evils that had crept into the Hindu society from the scandalous practice of kulinism which set up a quite arbitrary barrier between different classes of Brahmins.

Through the kind permission of his patron, Babu Kali Charan, Ram Narain had the book published in 1854, a review of which from the *Bhaskar* of the 23rd December of that year (corresponding to 9th Paush, 1261 B. S.), we give below (in English translation) :—

“We have received a copy of the new drama *Kulin-kulasarvasva* by Pandit Ram Narain Tarkaratna, senior professor, Hindu Metropolitan College. About the subject of the book, mention was made before in *Bhaskar*, and our readers might remember that Tarkaratna got prize of Rs. 50/- by composition of this book, from the generous land-holder Srila Srijiut Kali Charan Roy Choudhury and the latter appreciating the Pandit's merit presented the book to him and got the book printed. We have gone through the whole book and been much pleased with it.

“The drama has been well-written, specially the parts of the clever Rashika and Fulkumari have been excellent. The conversations of

Brahmin lady with her daughters which are quite natural, prove masterly craft of the writer. The episode of Dharmashil has been supported by various legends of the Puranas. In short, the book is an excellent one. A beautiful drama in Bengali like the present one will remove many evil practices from the society."

Rajah Iswar Chandra Singh also wrote to Keshab Gangulee :—"Ramnarain's K. K. S has acquired a just and well-merited fame."*

As *Disguise* of 1795 was a translation, *Kalirajar Yatra* (1821) a farcical piece, and *Vidyasundar* of 1832 not a drama but a metrical composition, properly speaking *Kulinkulasarvasva* was the first real Bengali Drama that was put on board the stage, in 1856. The time too was very opportune for staging the play. Our readers should remember that only two years ago or so, the Oriental Theatre which had given performances in English and had just given up staging English dramas. (Vide, my *Indian Stage* 1st Vol., page 304, and Iswar Chandra Singh's reminiscences, p. 221 of Michael's biography by Bose) had almost become defunct owing to the want of Bengali plays for which they had a bias. The appearance of *Kulinkulasarvasva*, therefore, at a time when the absence of Bengali drama was keenly felt, was very much welcomed by the young enthusiasts.

*(Michael's Biography by Jogindranath Bose, p. 220).

Kulinkulasarvasva marks, therefore, the epoch and was succeeded by a number of performances in Bengali in quick succession as *Sakuntala*, *Beni-Sanhar* etc. Indeed the credit of a true Benali play being first put on the stage goes undoubtedly to Pandit Ramnarain and all the responsible writers on the subject give him his due. A different note has however been strung by our esteemed friend Mr. Brajendra Nath Banerjee and the issue need be settled once for all, in order that our readers may not be misled. Our point is that “*Kulin Kula Sarvasva*” was staged some time in 1856 and *Sakuntala* was staged on January 30, 1857. The former was staged in the house of a middle-class man before common Bhadrals while the latter was shown in the house of a millionaire where all the noted Reis of the town and news-paper-editors were invited. The fact that the ordinary people’s performance did not find a place in a newspaper in time, should not be the ground to hold that it was not even staged. We halt here to give our reasons as follows :

The reminiscences of Babu Gourdas Bysak, Madhusudon’s friend, which have formed for half the century past as the most authentic history of the Stage are quite clear on the point. They run thus—

“Next in 1853-54 some of the ex-students of the Oriental Seminary, who formed a Dramatic Corps under the drilling of Messrs. Clinger and and Roberts, who belonged to the Sansouci

Theatre and opened a stage, called the Oriental Theatre in the premises of the Seminary, where they acted the plays of Othello and Merchant of Venice etc. It was Babu (since the Maharaja) Jatindra Mohan Tagore who first of all suggested to them that they should introduce native dramatic representations and organise a native Orchestra on the basis of our native instruments. Acting upon this hint they produced the sensational play of Kulin-Kula-Sarvasva and the theatre abruptly became defunct in 1856. The novel amusement received a temporary encouragement from the late Kali Prasanna Sinha and the grandsons of the late Babu Ashutosh Dev, who set up a stage in their respective mansions on which were given some performances in our national style."

Gourdas Babu was a grown up man when Kulin Kula Sarvasva (K.K.S) was staged at the house of his relation within a short distance from his house at 3, Bysak Lane and the reminiscences were written in the form of a letter to Mr. Jogendra Nath Bose, biographer of Madhusudan in May 1892. About the same time Pandit Mahendra Nath Bidyanidhi another veteran research-scholar on the Bengali stage also wrote in "Purohit" that Kulin-Kula-Sarvasva was the first drama staged and Sakuntala followed it.

This was also exactly the fact mentioned by the great historian Mr. R. C. Dutt, C. I. E. who wrote in his "Literature of Bengal" under

caption "Dramatic Writers" in chapter XVII page 184 the following :—

"At the special request of Jatindra Mohan Tagore (now Maharaja Sir Jatindra Mohan Tagore) Ramnarain's original drama Kulin Kula Sarvasva was acted in 1856."

Babu Sibnath Sastri in his "Ramtanu Lahiri and Bengal of his time" in page 232-238 writes as follows :—

"At the suggestion of the renowned Jatindra Mohan Tagore Kulin-Kula-Sarvasva was once performed at Oriental Theatre. This opened the door to dramatic performances in Bengal. Afterwards Babu Ashutosh Dev alias Chhatu Babu, famous in wealth got Sakuntala rendered into a Bengali drama and acted in his Calcutta residence at Simla."

Pandit Sibnath narrates also a little history of the Bengali stage and we find it an accurate one.

Next comes about the account given by Babu Jogindra Nath Bose in his famous biography of Madhusudan where he too gives a little history. There he writes :—

"Through the exertion of two actors of Oriental Theatre, Ramnarain's K. K. S. was staged at the house of Joyram Bysak at Charakdanga and this was perhaps the first performance after Vidyasundar at Nabin Babu's house. After this Sakuntala was performed at Chhatu Babu's house".

The history as given above, has been followed by all our predecessors on the subject. But not less authentic is the account given by Babu Mohendra Nath Mukherjee the renowned actor who appeared both at K.K.S. and Sakuntala performances. His account which forms an important chapter of *Puraton Prasanga* on the Bengali stage by Prof. Bepin Vihari Gupta, M.A., was certified also by Principal Krishna Kamal Bhattacharya, who was also present as a spectator, as the most accurate one (vide page 159 in the same book). Besides Mohendra Babu was also a noted actor at Pathuriaghata Raja's house. Thus Mr. Mukherjee writes—

“I played the part of Kulacharya in K.K.S. at Joyram Bysak's house. Before this only once there was a performance at Shambazar at Nabin Babu's house. K.K.S. was acted four times at that place. This was the first of its kind. The second was at Ashutosh Deb's house where I used to take the part of Rishi Kumar”.

All the authorities quoted above would leave no room for doubt about the precedence of K.K.S. over Sakuntala. What however emboldened Mr. Banerjee to advance his theory needs also mention. Strangely the letter of Gourdas Babu about his reminiscences about which we mentioned before and which was repeated in the second edition of Michael's biography too, got a metamorphosis in the third edition of the book in the following way :—

“The credit of organising the *first* Bengal Theatre belongs to the late Babu Joyram Bysak of Churrokdanga Street, Calcutta, who formed and drilled a Bengali dramatic corps and set up a stage in his house on which was performed in March 1857, the sensational Bengali play of *Kulinkulasarvasva* by Pandit Ramnarayana.

“The success and popularity that attended this *first* experiment led the late Babu Gopal Das Sett to form a similar corps and set up a stage in his house in Ratan Sircar’s Garden Street, on which the same play was repeated, before an enthusiastic audience. As naturally expected Vidya-sagore and Babu Kali Prasanna Sinha encouraged the actors in Babu Gadadhar Sett’s house, by their presence and personal interest.

“The late Babu Kali Prasanna Sinha evidently drew his inspiration of a native theatre *from* these performances.....”

“*Then* the grandsons of the late Babu Ashutosh Deb gave some dramatic performances in their house....”

The above reminiscences,* however, give the late Babu Joyram Bysak in whose house K.K.S. was staged, the credit of organising the *first* Bengali Theatre and put *Sakuntala* subsequent to it in point of time. The quotation, therefore, is

* *Michael M. S. Dutt’s Biography* by Jogindra Nath Bose, Page 648, Third Edition.

not of much help to Mr. Banerjee's contention even with regard to priority as here too K.K.S. precedes Sakuntala. But Mr. Banerjee now asserts that as the date of K. K. S. is March according to this account in the third edition and as Sakuntala was staged on January 30, 1857, the latter comes first in the order of precedence.

But how could the letter of 1892, published in the first two editions change in the third one published in 1905, December, six or seven years after Gourdas Babu's death, is the mystery. If Gourdas Babu made some changes or amendments, there would have been a letter to the effect or some mention by Jogendra Babu in the third edition. To us the reason seems to be quite clear. Jogendra Babu himself made a mistake in dates of performances though not in the priority, in the body of his book from the first edition to the third in chapter VIII when he mentioned about the performances of dramas. Subsequently he obtained reminiscences from Gourdas Babu and published in the appendix which would however go to prove his mistake about dates. In the third edition after Gourdas Babu's death,* he must have changed the reminiscences on the lines of his book, just to suit his purpose. Thus, however thankful we are to Mr. Bose for the excellent biography,

* Gourdas Babu died on May 25, 1899 at the age of 73.

he has been unkind to the readers giving a handle to fallacious reasoning.

This is all about the undoubted claim of Pandit Ramnarain's K. K. S. being the first drama staged about the time.

There were four performance in Bysak's house alone † and of these some in March 1857.

Now, to give an account of the performance of the first genuine Begali attempt, the stage was improvised in Bysak House at Churrok-danga (now Tagore Castle Road). It was constructed in the courtyard of the house under the supervision of Babu Rajendra Nath Banerjee—the Burra Babu, or the Head Clerk, of the East Indian Railway Company, with the assistance of Babu Jagat Durlabh Bysak,

Joyram Bysak, Jagat Durlabh Bysak, Joyram's nephew, Narain Chandra Bysak, Rajendra Nath Banerjee, Mahendra Nath Mukherjee, Radha Prasad Bysak and Behari Lal Chatterjee (afterwards the manager of "Bengal Theatre") were the artists and of them Behari Lal was the first, who, as we shall see, appeared as an actor on the public stage. All these persons were the former actors of the Oriental Theatre and it was about them, Babu Gaurdas Bysak must have made references in his above letter.

† Mahendranath Mukherjee's reminiscences *Puratan Prasanga* (Prathama Paryyaya) p. 149, and *Hindu Patriot* March 19, 1857.

Next, about the performances at Sett's house,* we find reference to one of the performances in the *Samvad Prabhakara* of 22nd March, 1858. It also appears that *Hindu Patriot* of the 18th April 1858 devoted a few lines commenting upon performance in general. The latter was a disparaging criticism wherein it was averred "that the less said about the performances the better, but there were one or two persons whose talents as mimics may develop in the fullness of time."

A rejoinder was immediately sent to the press from the members of the *Vernacular Theatre* as it was called, and it was asserted there that men like Babu Kisor Chand Mitter, Peari Chand Mitter, Kshetra Chandra Ghose, Dr. Rajendra Lal Mitter and Nagendra Nath Tagore were all present at the performance and throughout the play they accorded to the actors their heart-felt and sincere approbation.

The *Samvad-Prabhakar* also highly spoke about the performance that was attended by 600

* About the performance we get some idea from the reminiscences of Mahendra Mukherjee :

"Râjendra Vâvu Jagaddurlabh Vâvu divya bhundi
laiya mathay lambâ tiki vilambita kariya
Brâhmana pandit sâjiyâchilen. Rajendra
Vâvur haste ekati samuker nasyâdhârâ.
Tâhârâ duijane yakhan tarka vitarka
kariten, takhan srotrivrinda hasiya euhar gaye
padita, o uhar gaye padita. Ekati sakher dala
vâjâita. Ami kulâchâryya sâjitâm."

—*Puratan Prasanga*

or 700 persons. Radha Prasad Bysak admirably represented the character of Ghatak and Sripati Mukherjee, Head master of Janai School, appeared in the role of Dharamshila. The *Prabhakara* also bore testimony to the presence of Vidyasagar Mahasaya at the performance and in this point corroborates the statement of Babu Gourdas Bysak.

Gopal Sett himself, the son of Babu Gadadhar Sett, in whose house the play was staged, Priyanath Dutt, Gadadhar's grandson, Nakur Chandra Sett and Narayan Chandra Bysak, who played in Bysak's house, were in their respective roles here as well. , Narayan appeared in the role of Jahnabi and in that of Rasika Naptini.

"The unprecedented sensation into which the whole native community was thrown", says Babu Gourdas Bysak "after the celebration of the first widow marriage under the ægis of that redoubtable apostle of social reform, Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar accounted for the interest and excitement which these performances of a play representing a social reform, created at the time." Indeed, the *Kulinkulasarvasva* was performed in the teeth of great opposition from a section of the Hindu community and that its influence was great upon the society, cannot be gain-said. From the following extract of the *Hindu Patriot*, dated the 15th July 1858, it will be seen how the Kulins of the Hooghly District were against its performance ;

“The acting of the *Kulinkulasarvasva Natak* at Chinsurah has, it appears, given great offence to the Kulins of the locality. The Natak is an ill-executed burlesque. The acting took place in the house of a gentleman of the Baniya caste and Kulin Brahmins intended, it is said, to retaliate in kind.”

“The gentleman referred to,” was probably Babu Narottam Pal.* Rupchand Pakshee, a noted musician of that time, composed songs for the occassion and sang them.†

From the very beginning, the Kulins of Bengal were opposed to its performance‡ and the *Hindu Patriot* does not seem to have been much in favour of the play.

But all those, who had the courage to stage the drama, deserve our respectful thanks for their noble innovation, which inspired others for Bengali plays at a time when the educated Bengalees and the students showed their decided preference and love for English dramas, and the College students acted only the English plays.

Kulinkulasarvasva was thus a great innovation both as a drama and as an acting piece on the stage, and we repeat the words of Rajah Iswar Chandra that ‘it acquired a just and well-merited fame.’

Next, we must mention about the drama *Svarnasrinkhal Natak*, which was staged at

**Samvad-Prabhakara* (3rd July, 1858).

†Akshay Sarkar’s reminiscences, *Father & Son*.

‡*Calcutta Review* 1873, page 275.

Barisal. One would not even wonder if he hears that this might have been staged even before *Kulinkulasarvasva*. The book was printed at Dacca in 1863 and in the apologium was mentioned the following :

“About eight years ago, (that is, in 1855-56) this drama was written at Barisal for its representation there,”

We have, however, no further reference of this drama or its representation, but it seems that theatre was making its appearance even in Muffasil.

CHAPTER II

BENGALI DRAMAS IN THE MUTINY YEAR

1. At Chhatu Babu's House.

After *Kulinkulasarvasva*, the next attempt was made in the house of Babu Ashutosh Dev, the millionaire of Calcutta, popularly known as Chhatu Babu, by his grandsons, who called themselves as members of *Jnanapradayini Sabha*. The drama was not an original one, but a translation of Kalidasa's *Sakuntala* into Bengali by Nanda Lal Roy,* but all the same it was a genuine Bengali play. Although opinion

* *Samvad-Prabhakar*, 15th June 1857.

was divided* as to its success, the attempt, however, was really very praiseworthy.

We have accounts of the performances of *Sakuntala* in the above house, one on the 30th January† and another on the 22nd February 1857.‡ The stage wore a beautiful appearance and it was of the nature of a private theatrical, making an accommodation of about 400 persons. Mr. O. C. Dutt (grandson-in-law of Chhatu Babu) composed songs and was the stage-manager.

Babu Priyamadhav Basu Mullick appeared in the role of Dusmanta, Annada Mukherjee of Durvâsâ, Mahendra Nath Mukherjee of Kanva's disciple, Abinash Chandra Ghosh of Anusūyâ and Bhuban Ghosh of Priyamvadâ and last but not the least Babu Sarat Chandra Ghosh (a grand-son of Chhatu Babu, a born actor and afterwards founder of the well-known Bengal Theatre) was in the role of Sakuntalâ. Sarat Babu looked really grand and queenly in his gestures and address and did great justice to the part of the heroine he was enacting. The other amateurs also succeeded in creating an effect.

This was the view of the contemporaneous paper, the *Hindu Patriot*.

It, however, held that full measure of success could not be realised and the corps dramatique

* *Hindu Patriot*, 5th Feb. 1857.

† *Hindu Patriot*, 5th Feb. 1857.

‡ *Prabhakar*, 26th Feb. 1857.

required more polishing. Babu Kisorī Chand Mitter, the great social reformer and a veteran journalist went, however, a step further and considered 'the performance of *Sakuntala* at Simla a failure'. In his opinion *Sakuntala* being a masterpiece of dramatic genius, required versatile and consummate talent rarely to be met with in this country.

Sakuntala was also staged on Jan. 1, 1858 by the students of a Middle Bengali School of Raruli (Jessore), and we hear of another performance at Janai (Hooghly) in the house of Babu Purna Chandra Mukherjee in May 1858. The gathering there was large and the stage and hall were nicely decorated and illuminated. The parts of Dusmanta and *Sakuntalâ* were ably performed and other parts well sustained. It was after all a "Village theatre" with all defects for the first amateurs.

The Hindu Patriot of June 10, 1858 writes thus :—

On Saturday the 29th ultimo our village amateurs played the *Sakuntala*—Kalidasa. As naturally expected there was a large gathering of the respectable people of the locality on the occasion. The stage was nicely decorated and the hall was splendidly illumined. The performance was more than expected from youths reared and bred up in village schools. Justice demands we should mention the talents displayed by the gentlemen who personated Raja Doosmunt and Sakontolah. The manly gait and deportment of Doosmunta showed at once that he was just the man represented by the Poet. While his beloved partner in love resembled in every point the amazingly beautiful

daughter of the heavenly nymph Menoka. Bedoosak and other characters were well performed and each had his proficiency in his own particular way. The music played by amateurs was capital, but that by the hand was horribly disgusting. We wish a better management of the screen had been made. Indeed after the first act was over, the screen dropped and was so disordered that it could not be soon taken up.

The audience was thus kept waiting in anxiety and suspense for a period of more than half an hour. This defect in the management of the screen we have reason to complain of in almost all native performances. Our present theatrical exhibitions are conducted in the English style and this important feature of the English stage should be duly learnt before any thing like completion and success could be attained...

In conclusion we sincerely thank Baboo Poorno Chunder Mookerjee for the liberality evinced by him in rearing up this useful institution, and we trust that his example will not be lost sight of by others of his class. He has indeed "given gold a price and taught its beams to shine."

We hear of another play *Mahasveta*, a Bengali rendering of the famous Sanskrit novel *Kadambari*. Its author Mani Mohan Sarkar subsequently won reputation for the composition of a Yâtrâ piece, called *Usha* and *Aniruddha*, which, as we shall see hereafter, was the first Yâtrâ performance enacted by the master-dramatist Girish Chandra Ghosh. *Mahasveta*

¹ *Calcutta Review* 1873, page 282, 'Modern Dramas'.

² *Samvad-Prabhakar* Sept. 16, 1857.

³ The book itself gives this cast.

was first performed in Bhâdra (September) 1857 at the house of Babu Charu Chandra Ghosh and the cast was as follows :

Raja	... Annada Prasad Mukherjee.
Pundarika and Nata	... Mahendra Nath Mazumder.
Kapinjala	... Mani Mohan Sarkar (author).
Kanchuki	... Shiv Chand Sinha.
Mahasveta and Nati	... Kshetra Mohan Sinha.
Kadambari	... Mahendra Nath Ghosh
Taralika	... Sarat Chandra Ghosh.
Rani	... Bhuban Mohan Ghosh.
Chhatradharini	... Mahendra Nath Mukherjee.

The Drama was published in Kârtik, 1266 B.S.

II. Vidyotsahini Theatre.

We now come to the Bengali Theatre in the house of late Kali Prasanna Sinha, who, though then a young man of 15 or 16 in the year 1857, took a leading part in the social, political and intellectual life of Bengali Hindus and founded a literary association, named *Vidyotsahini Sabha* in his house in the year 1855.* This literary association, under the direct and close supervision of Kaliprasanna, did much in the resuscitation of the Hindu drama and Hindu Theatre by writing and staging Bengali plays after the style of Sanskrit dramas instead of attempting foreign pieces unsuited to the

* Mr Manmatha Nath Ghose M. A. in his *Memoirs of Kaliprasanna Sinha*, has given this date and we, on a reference to all papers, consider it to be authentic,

national taste. In the year 1857, Kaliprasanna started a Theatre, called the Vidyotsâhini Theatre under the auspices of the 'Sabhâ following in the wake of the Bysaks and on the lines of Babu Sarat Chandra Ghosh (Sakuntalâ).

Babu Gourdas Bysak, in his reminiscences, writes :—

“The late Babu Kaliprasanna Sinha evidently drew his inspiration of native theatre from these performances, for it was that time that he set up a stage in his mansion on which were produced in a superb native style and before a large and influential audience composed of the elite of the European and native society, Bengali renderings of the Sanskrit plays of *Venisamhara*, *Malatimadhava* and *Vikramorvasi*.* The first play, staged in this Theatre, was *Benisamhara*, rendered from the well-known Sanskrit drama of Bhatt Naraina by Ram Narain Tarkaratna.† It was put on the stage on Saturday, the 11th April 1857 before a number of audience, as we get from a correspondent of *Hindu Patriot* (April 16, 1857) :

“Last Saturday, the 9th instant another Hindoo Theatre was inaugurated under the title of Vidyotsâhini Theatre. Several gentle-

* ‘Babu’ a farce was composed in 1855 under the patronage of Kaliprasanna, but there is no trace of its being staged.

† Some wrongly held Kaliprasanna himself to be the author. (Vide, Preface of the book).

men, native and European, were present and the *Venisamhar Natak* was acted with considerable applause. The dialogues were mostly in *Payurs* (couplets) and *Tripadis* (triplets) instead of dramatic verses. But songs were wanting. The performance on the whole was very creditable to the Young Hindu Amateurs to whose zeal and spirit the theatre owes its existence. As to how the performance was successful we would better quote the remarks of Mr. Ghose from his *Memoirs of Kaliprasanna*, page 28 :

“The performance was highly successful* and elicited unanimous praises from the European and native gentlemen of rank and station, who attended theatre. We have heard from reliable sources that Kali Prasanna, who represented the part of Princess Bhānumatī played it to perfection and was welcomed with roars of applause, when he appeared before the admiring gaze of the audience as a beautiful girl dressed in a rich, gold-embroidered Benârsi *sadi* and decked with priceless jewels, which belonged to his family and excited the envy of the richest men in Calcutta.”

Kali Prasanna Sinha, then a young boy of sixteen, was the observed of all observers. Adorned with ornaments and jewels, he appeared in the character of Bhānumatī. The jewelleryes he put on would be worth more than

* Preface of *Vikramorvasi*.

a lac of rupees. Fort Williams Band played the Orchestra and Sir Cecil Beadon with a number of European gentlemen was present and and encouraged the undertaking by his warm appreciation. As the above play was not quite suitable for the Bengali stage, its diction being too heavy and as there was no drama besides *Kulinkulasarvasva* and the *Sakuntala*, Kali Parsanna took upon himself the task of writing suitable play :

Vikramorvasi—a free translation of Kâlidâsa's drama of the name was written and published in September, 1857 and staged at the Vidyotsâhini Theatre with great eclat and the remarks of the *Hindu Patriot* would give a faithful account of its performance.*

There was no Sūtradhâra like the old Sanskrit drama and music consisted of both by amateurs and the Town Band. Kali Parsanna himself took the part of Pururavâh and performed it with consummate histrionic skill. The late Mr. W. C. Banerjee (then a boy of thirteen) and other distinguished men represented other parts. Not to speak of the *Hindu Patriot* of the time, Mr. Kishori Chand Mitter also in his posthumous article on *Modern Hindu Drama* failed not to notice the performance in the following words :

“There was a large gathering of native and European gentlemen, who were unanimous in

* *Hindu Patriot*, Dec. 8, 1857,

praising the performance. Amongst the latter, Mr. Beadon, afterwards Sir Cecil Beadon, the then Secretary to the Government of India expressed to us his unfeigned pleasure at the admirable way in which the principal characters sustained their parts."

Calcutta Review, 1873, p. 253.

We now quote extracts from the *Hindu Patriot*, December 3, 1857 :

The Vidyotsahini Theatre

Our readers will remember that about six weeks ago, we reviewed in these columns Baboo Kali Prasanna Sinha's translation of *Vikramorvasi* of Kalidasa. In the present issue, we have to notice the performance of that drama got up under the auspices of the same Baboo in his own mansion. The native gentry of Calcutta and suburbs representing the intelligence, taste, good sense, fashion and respectability of Hindu society, were all present in gorgeous winter garments but the audience was too large for the place and we hear with regret that many members of the Chowringhee aristocracy were obliged to run counter on account of the alarming density of the collection. Whatever the public may complain of with respect to the unrestricted distribution of tickets of admission, we must do justice to Baboo Kali Prasanna Sinha to whose liberal mind and general munificence, Calcutta owes a most

significant institution for rational amusement. The Vidyotsahini Theatre is in the second year of its existence and though it is a private property, the intelligent and respectable public may as freely enjoy its benefit as they do partake of the common air we live in. The eclat with which *Vikramorvasi* was performed on the last occasion was great. The stage was beautifully decorated and the theatre room was as nobly adorned as cultivated taste could dictate or enlightened fashion could lead to. No delicate consideration of economy was ever thought of, and the result was most magnificent and gratifying. The marble painting on the frontispiece of the stage was as neat as elegant and the stone pictures of Bharata and Kalidas, though mostly imaginary, were executed with so much nicely and taste that one was involuntarily reminded of the classic days of Grecian Sculpture and painting casting into form of Gods and Goddesses of heavenly birth. The reception was very courteous and gracious which was conducted by our excellent townsman, Babu Huro Chunder Ghose. But we can not afford space for details though the narration of which in the present instance is pleasant. We shall at once notice the performance leaving aside all unnecessary preliminaries and the grateful reminiscences of older drama.

The peculiar characteristic of our theatrical is the absence of dramatic opening which belongs to the *romantic school of the modern drama*. We have the old Grecian way of opening the play by the appearance of the Manager of the stage, who explains to the audience the nature and character and in some instances

the incidents of the performances. But accompaniment of music and songs relieves that dull delay and patience-trespassing colon, which like a forced march, is always tiresome, for we must bear in mind that the spectator has ever the incidents of the story vividly stamped on his mental vision and does not want to be helped in the margin.

In B.S. Theatre the music was excellent, both when the amateurs performed and when the Town Band played, They awakened in the souls of the feeling portion of the audience, who had any sympathy for sounds the most pleasant emotion and kept the chord in a remarkable beautiful harmony. Of the performance nothing can be exaggeratedly stated. The part of the king Purarovah represented by Babu Kali Prasanna Sinha was admirably done. His mien was right royal and his voice truly imperial. From the first scene of the play when he with his pleasant companion, a civilized buffoon commenced to interchange words of fellowship, to the last scene when he was translated with his fair Urvasi to heaven, he kept the audience continuously alive and made a most gladsome impression on their minds. Every word he gave utterance to, was suited to the action which followed it. In the language of the poet he did truly hold the mirror up to nature. Whose heart did not palpitate with the most quick emotions when the king hearing the nymphs cry for help announced his approach in the most heroic strain and went to their relief ? The act was as chivalrous as it was heroic. There was the

romance of real life represented in true colours. But how sweetly does the language of love convey its meaning to a lover's mind. Urvasi is rescued from the infernal clutches of the demon. She thanks in a soft but most eloquent language her gallant saviour ; Chitralekha, her lady of honour mingles in the song of thanksgiving, while the king hears in the dulcet air the passionate voice of love.

The scene lay in the Hemcott range and the romantic objects that allured observations from around ,with the angelic charm of Urvasi and the glorious graces of her lovely companion, threw the mind of the King into a kind of magical enchantment and his vision henceforth became the heavenly fair. Then comes the scene of the descending of the Heavenly Car with Urvasi and Chitralekha on, singing in a most rapturous strain and lapping the gazing soul literally, as it were, in Elysian bliss. If there could be angel visits on earth which poets sing of, the appearance of Urvasi with her ethereal companion in the heavenly car was such a visit. It struck the heart of every one of the spectators. It almost realised the scriptural vision of Elija's ascension to Heaven. We have seen pictures of Grecian Gods driving chariots and read of ancient heroes skimming the air through such cars, but all the glowing figures of imagination which we have formed melted away as the mists disappeared and the heavenly car from Indra's region neared our common earth. The attitude of Urvasi on the car was delightfully picturesque, and the sweet songs and music which attended the des-

cent, gave it the glow of an Arabian Night's dream. But the enchantment was not yet complete. She came and vanished like a vision. The king was restless, and in the madness of love appealed with child-like simplicity to the counsel of Vidusaka, the buffoon who like Lear's fool mocked his sorrow but never leaving his moralizing occupation.

The disconsolate Devee, wife to the king, worships the gods to cure her husband's misdirected love but subsequently moved by the frantic state of the Raja disavows her worship, recalls prayer and seconds his wish to propitiate the deities to gratify his desire. This is the true picture of Hindu Lady, who at the sacrifice of her own happiness would even submit to austerities and observances for the fulfilment of her lord's wishes. Next opens the affecting part of the play. The commencement is solemn and the circumstance serious. The electric light opens upon the air and the artillery of heaven roars tremendously ; in the midst of this scene the King enters singly and in a state of excitement, cries for Urvashi in a most lamentable strain, turns his mind inward, discourses with his own soul, rings the bells of his passion and address the woods and trees, the birds and skies, in a most pathetic tone. This part of action was most difficult, and our friend Kaliprasanna did it well. There on addressing the mountain—now the woods behind,—now the river beneath and now the birds above, with the essential pauses of affection, when the heart is rent by the agony of love, like Milton's Adam at the loss of Eve—the

soliloquizing in the most pathetic manner and calling forth the most tender emotion from the deep wells of passion a la Hamlet—the repeated falls which the king met with from the negative replies which he construed in that frantic mood from the significant sound that dropped—all these were quite natural and most admirably got into action. However we would not give anything for the Urvasi for whom the king had spent so much breath. We doubt whether our countrymen would content themselves with presenting to the world such an Urvasi, whom poetry represents as the paragon of beauty, as was represented at the B. S. T. But we do not disparage her. She will make a different being that is more acceptable,—if she continue on earth, for love-making in heaven is quite another affair, and is not suited to the taste of us mortals. “Bedoosok” was ably performed, but his jokes were lost partly on account of the noise, and partly on account of the unintelligibility of the language. The Cowar was just like Home’s Young Norval, and the caressing address of Urvasi, set in tune, was most magnificently done. Other characters were indifferently good, but the voice, which spoke from behind the scene, was really abominable,

While we thus do justice to Babu Kali Prasanna Sinha, we must, however, be allowed to express one patriotic wish. With all its excellencies the Vidyotsahini Theatre is a private establishment, though its very existence is a sign of the times. The attempt to cultivate the drama is justly praiseworthy, but what we

would like to have is the public institution of the kind of a *permanent* character. The age is much too advanced to wait for an elaborate dissertation on the usefulness of such an institution in order to get it established. There are many among us, we know, with good sense and sufficiency enough to come forward and aid such a project and at the head of that band we unhesitatingly put down the name of Babu Kali Prasanna Sinha. Let the lovers and patrons of the drama form themselves into a body, take the project into their consideration and they are assured of every encouragement and co-operation from the *Hindu Patriot*.

The above remarks would show the part the press was playing in the resuscitation of Hindu drama, a thing quite worthy of it.

In 1858 Kali Prasanna wrote and published another drama of the name of *Savitri-Satyavan*. To all intents and purposes it was an original drama, though the main plot was drawn from the *Mahabharata*. *Vabu*, it appears, was only a farce composed under the auspices of Vidyotsāhini and there is no evidence of its being put on board of theatre at all.

The story of *Savitri* and *Satyavan* runs thus :

Sāvitri the daughter of King Aśvapati had engaged to be the wife of Satyavān, the son of the deposed King Dyumatsen, who had turned a hermit. Though revealed to her by the divine sage that Satyavān was to live only one year longer, she faithfully kept her vow and was united in marriage to the hermit-prince.

Agreeable to the prediction of the holy sage, the prince died after one year, but the faithful wife clung to his dead body and would not deliver it up though claimed by Yama, the King of terrors in prison. At last King Yama, while giving *Vara* (वर्, boon), was fairly outwitted by the gentle but heroic Sāvitri and eventually Satyavān was restored to life.

There is a departure in this drama from the Sanskrit model, as regards the *Ankas*. It adopted the plan of European drama of the five Acts ; of our present dramas too the best are of five acts only.

The play was staged on the 5th June, 1858 * and successfully, like the previous performances. We get from *Calcutta Review* (1859, March, Vol. 32) the following :

“The performance, we are bound to say, does no little credit to him. The characters are on the whole well-drawn, the scenes are interesting, dialogues smart and spirited and the style chaste.”

We may here mention to our readers that Sāvitri formed an interesting theme for many later dramatists. Pandit Kshirode Prasad Vidyabinode produced one in 1901 at the Star Theatre and a few years ago in 1931 May, Star and Nāṭyaniketan vied with each other in the representation of *Sati* on the stage. Sāvitri is also an interesting topic for the present-day cinema pictures.

* *Prabhakar*, 4th June, 1858.

In 1859 Kali Prasanna wrote and published another drama, the *Malatimadhava* or the Indian Romeo and Juliet, based on Bhavabhūti's wellknown Sanskrit drama of the name. It was almost an original drama, interspersed with some beautiful songs. The author seemed from his preface to have adopted this more to the purposes of stage which could not be served by his previous dramas.

Kali Prasanna continued, till his death, to take a lively interest for the improvement of the Bengali Stage and Bengali Dramas, and if he lived longer, we would have expected more valued efforts towards the revival of drama and stage. All his attempts towards new ideals and reforms, even before Madhusudan came to the field, were really very praise-worthy.

Chapter III

THE BELGACHHIA THEATRE

The first permanent stage of Bengal.

If any parallel is to be drawn, the Belgachhia Theatre was to Bengal, what the Globe was in England during the Elizabethan age. With it dates the beginning of the *permanent Bengali Stage*, as all other attempts previous to this however laudable or brilliant, were but sporadic and temporary, hence little abiding in their influence. Such was its enlightened atmosphere and cultural spell that soon pervaded the intelligentsia of Calcutta with a genuine love and desire for national drama and for a national stage. Above all, its service to Bengali literature is invaluable, and so long the language is spoken or written, its rich contributions will never be forgotten.

The Belgachhia Theatre drew out one of the greatest poets of the modern world, we mean Michael Madhusudan Dutt, and but for this it is doubtful whether Madhusudan would have seriously turned to Bengali literature at all.

The thoroughly anglicised youth, who prided in his mis-spelling of a common Bengali word, has left the greatest classical work in

Bengali poetry. Our task of course is not to pursue Madhusudan's career as a poet, but to notice only a particular side of his great and versatile genius. Madhusudan is unquestionably the greatest classical poet of Bengal and one of the greatest masters of epic in world's literature ; and we may also unhesitatingly add that Madhusudan Dutt is the first great genuine master of dramatic works in Bengali literature. As a drama *Kulinkulasarvasva Natak* does not stand any comparison with *Krisnakumari* and his two farcical comedies still hold high place among the witty productions in Bengali literature.

During the performance of the *Sakuntala* in the house of Babu Ashutosh Dev, *vide* page 36, Babu (afterwards Maharaja) Jatindra Modan Tagore, a highly enlightened zeminder of Calcutta and a nephew of Babu Prasanna Kumar Tagore met Raja Iswar Chandra Singh of Paikpara, Belgachhia, and his brother Pratap Chandra Singh, who, too, came to witness the performance. Iswar Chandra and Pratap Chandra were in the words of Babu Gour Das Bysak two nature's noblemen, "impregnated with true patriotic zeal for the welfare and advancement of the country." Jatindra Mohan in a highly opportune moment, when they were witnessing the performance, spoke to the brothers about the desirability of having a permanent Bengali stage. It was, asserted Jatindra Mohan, a sheer waste of time and

money to fritter away energy and enthusiasm in performances for a day or two. The idea was instantly taken up by the two brothers and in due course of time the famous Belgachhia Theatre came into existence. It was indeed a red letter day both for the Bengali drama and for Bengali language.

The history of the foundation of the Belgachhia Theatre can be gathered from a letter written by Raja Iswar Chandra Singh* to Babu Keshav Chandra Ganguly, on the *27th August 1858*, within a year of the foundation of the Calcutta University :

“When three or four years ago, you all quarrelled with the proprietor of the Oriental Seminary, we all proposed to have a native drama written out and acted and such was our earnestness in the cause that we all asked you to select and hire a site and a native gentleman was asked either for the loan or hire of the premises. Somehow or other the subject dropped here, and was never thought of more till a year and a half ago, when we found some youngsters getting up a representation of a native drama. At this time a consultation was held and after much discussion the *Ratnavali* was fixed upon as the best drama or one of the best dramas that our Sanskrit could boast of. Then again came the difficulty of finding a man who, with a thorough knowledge of the language, would combine a dramatic talent. The man was at last found. Sometime before this the *Kulin-*

* *Vide*, page, 220, Michael's life by Jogindra Babu,

kulasarvasva had acquired a just and well merited fame and the author was *pitched* upon as the only pandit, who, with a good knowledge of Sanskrit, combined dramatic talent and subsequently the translation was entrusted to him.

Next, Iswar Chandra proceeds to give an account as to how a year and a half they took to prepare the play by having too many rehearsals and fixing too many details.

The stage was built at enormous cost borne by the two Rajas of Paikpara and their magnificent Belgachhia villa formerly owned by Prince Dwarkanath Tagore, with the whole place appearing more like a fairy land, added considerably to the beauty and pomp of the dramatic entertainment.

The theatre opened with the performance of the drama *Ratnavali* beginning from 8-30 P. M. and closing at 12-30 on Saturday, July 31, 1858, and about the success of the performance Babu Gourdas Bysak, who was an actor himself and the best friend of Michael Madhusudan Dutt, described in his reminiscences in the following manner in 1892 :

“To say that the Belgachhia Theatre scored a brilliant success is to repeat truism that has passed into a proverb. It achieved a success unparalleled in the annals of Amateur Theatricals in this country. The graceful stage, the superb sceneries, the stirring Orchestra, the dresses, the costly appurtenances, the splendid get up of the whole concern were worthy of

the brother Rajas and the genius of their intimate friend Maharaja Jatindra Mohan Tagore, an accomplished connoisseur. The performance of a single play, *Ratnavali*, which alone cost the Rajas *ten thousand rupees*, realised the idea, and established the character of the real Hindu drama with improvements suited to the taste of an advanced age."

The *Hindu Patriot* of the time also wrote about it in the following way* :

"The characters were so nicely balanced ; the tone, the gesture and what is called dramatic action were so clever and consistent, and the counterfeit of passions so natural and life-like that we little expected so much excellence at the outset of a dramatic company. Indeed from first to last, stage was all action and animation and audience was all attention. The drama, though not without some merits, is not much to our taste but superior talent of the amateurs made amends for the feebleness of the play."

Babu Sriram Chatterjee, distinguished scholar of the Hindu College, wrote after seeing the performance :

"It can be said without contradiction that the stage presented the appearance of Indra's palace. The whole audience was so charmed beyond measure that even myself, however cynical in many matters, remained entranced, as it were.*

The elite of the town was present and amongst others were noticed Sir Frederick

* H. P. 5th August, 1858.

* *Madhu's Biography.*

Halliday, Mr. Hume, Mr. Goodive Chakraborty, Kali Krishna Bahadur, Ramgopal Ghose, Peari Chand mitter. Kisori Chand Mitter, Ramnarain Tarkaratna, the Judges and Magistrates of Calcutta and other higher officials and non-officials.†

Most of the actors later in life occupied high status in society and the cast was distributed as follows :

Raja Udayan	... Preonath Dutt, afterwards Asst. Controller General.
Vasantaka (jester)	... Keshav Chandra Ganguly, afterwards Superintendent, Controller General's office.
Rumanvan (general)	... Raja Iswar Chandra Singh.
Yangandhrayana (minister)	Babu Gourdas Bysak, De- puty Magistrate, next Deonath Ghosh, Officer Finance Department and a Ray Bahadur.
Vabhravya	... Nabin Chandra Mukherjee.
Bahubhuti	... Girish Chandra Chatterjee.
Vasavadatta	... Mahendra Nath Goswami.
Ratnavali	... Hem Chandra Mukherjee.
Susangata	... Aghore Chandra Digharia.
Bajikar (magician)	... Srinath Sen.
Darwan	... Jadu Nath Ghose.
Sutradhar	... Kshetra Mohan Goswami.
Chopdars	... Dwaraka Nath Mullick and Krishna Gopal Ghose.
Nati	... Ramnath Laha.

Dancers	... Kalidas Sanyal and Kafi Prasanna Banerjee.
Kanchanamala	... A Brahmin youth from Serampore.
Music Master	... Maharaja Jatindra Mohan.
Concert	... Kshetra Mohan Pal and Jadunath Goswami, the famous musician of Bengal.*

Besides Dr. Rajendra Lal Mitra, Pandit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagore, Ramaprasad Roy, (who was appointed as the first Indian Judge of the High Court but died before taking his seat), Dwarakanath Mullick of Pataldanga, Tara Charan Guha of Hogal-Kuria and other persons of lead and light, used to take a keen interest for the success of the performance.

As to how the artists acquitted themselves in their respective roles, we should better quote the words of Babu Gourdas Bysak† :

"The dramatic corps was drawn from the flower of our educated youth. Among the actors, Babu Keshav Chandra Ganguly stood pre-eminent. Endowed by nature with histrionic talent of no mean order, he represented the *Vidusaka* (jester) with such life-like reality, and so rich a fund of humour as to be styled the "Garriick of our Bengali Stage." Raja Iswar Chandra Singh, who looked a prince every inch, encased in mail-coat armour, with a jewelled sword hanging by

* Mr. J. N. Basu's book, p. 223.

† *Madhusudan's Biography* by J. N. Bose, 223.

his side, acted his part, with wonderful effect, befitting the character of a generalissimo. *Sagarika*, the sea-rescued heroine depicted in the play as a maiden of exemplary patience under suffering, extreme modesty and a heart tender and susceptible to the influence of love was represented by an intelligent Brahmin lad, whose musical voice enchanted the audience. The queen Vāsavadattā who is most queenly in her character had her part admirably acted by a handsome young lad Mahendra Nath Goswami even to the line in the original—"Resigns all hope of life which is now unbearable". The scene in which the magician (Srinath Sen) set fire to the house of Raja Udayana, King of Kashmir, by means of his wand and incantations (*mantras*) and the flashes of light that were produced by storntium red fire (then quite a rare and novel substance here) as well as the scene in which the full moon rose behind the plantain grove, were so affectingly enacted as to rivet the wonder and admiration of the audience. The manner in which the other actors, one and all, acquitted themselves met with the warmest applause from the audience—an audience composed of the elite of Calcutta, the cream of European and native society. Eminent Government officials and high non-official gentlemen who witnessed the performances spoke of "exquisite treat" they had enjoyed as heightening their idea of our Indian music and of our Indian stage. The Lieutenant Governor, Sir Frederick

Halliday, who was present with his family, was so delighted with acting of Babu Keshav Chandra that he complimented him on his extraordinary dramatic talents. He said that looking at his serious and sedate appearance one could hardly believe him capable of acting so capitally the part of the Jester.*

So eager were the people to see the performance that on one occasion a certain wealthy gentleman of Calcutta unable to obtain an invitation from the Rajas offered even a hundred rupees or more for the purchase of a single ticket. It was something preposterous, no doubt, but it showed the eagerness evinced by the people to witness the performance of Belgachhia amateurs.

Babu Kisorī Chand Mitra also wrote in the *Calcutta Review* about Keshav thus :

“The part of the king and Ratnāvalī were performed by youngmen, who acquitted themselves most creditably in their situation which were eminently dramatic but the gem of the actors was Vasantaka, who was represented by Babu Keshav Chandra Ganguly. His ready wit, his brilliant *bonmots*, inimitable comic humour may fairly entitle him to the praise of being the best actor in Bengal. He kept up the interest of the play most successfully and was the life

* Jogendra Nath Bose's Biography of Michael M. S. Dutt in Bengali, p. 648-49, 3rd. Edition.

and soul of the performance. The performance was a great success."

Michael Madhusudan Dutt, who was most intimately associated with this Theatre dedicated afterwards his drama *Krisnakumari* to Keshav Chandra whom he called "The first actor of the age."

Now let us see how far did the outside opinion accept the performance. The *Hindu Patriot* of the 5th August, 1858 thus writes :

"We most willingly call to notice the excellent performance of the character of *Ratnavali*, the heroine of the play..... The passions, the emotions were so vividly depicted that we scarcely believe, there was one among the audience upon whom these did not make an impression and such as is not likely soon to wear away. The part of the king did not want in dignity, in earnestness or in depth and if, as we have heard some friends remark, his lament over the sufferings of his love was too theatrical and the action therein exceeding the language of his grief, we must absolve him from all blame, who was too knowing not to know the measure of the lament. For sooth the passion was wrought up to so high a pitch that less earnestness would have become indecorous : the defect was that the plot of the play was not fully developed to give nature adequate scope for action. Union is not only strength but beauty ; this was remarkably illustrated in the conjoint action of the King and *Ratnavali*, both when the latter reduced to the last point of despair was about

to transmigrate herself to the other world, where there would be no grief and disappointment and when she was surprised to see the king come to her rescue when the apartments of her confinement were in flames. Then the king snatching his dearest love, as it were, from the grasp of grim Death—Ratnavali falling senseless with all the tranquil beauty of such an hour on the arms of her lover—His Kingship's awakening her to sense with gentle strokes of affections, and her gradually regaining life and strength the confused interchange and intermingling of affections—Oh ! it was Exquisite, Exquisite. It brought tears to many eyes, we shall never forget it. There was then the King's jester in it. The character kept the audience in incessant laughter and nothing could be finer and more amusing than the joy, hilarity what we may call verbose delight and penitent wonder which were specially called forth during the little interlearned comedies of errors which perpetually animated the conversations and witticisms of Vasantaka. There was so much worldliness mixed up with pleasantry in this character that it required consummate mastery of human nature and thorough knowledge of the world which we are happy to say, the amateur displayed to admiration. The interest of the performance of the part was so great that the jester was the special favourite of the night's audience. Susangata the queen's maid also Ratnavali's friend was pretty well in keeping with her part and the artless cunning with which she superintended the first two visits of the king with his love, was characteristic. The queen's

part was somewhat wanting in queenliness but the moral control which she held over the king was so inexorably exercised that an exemplary husband told us in confidence nothing could be more true to nature. The story of the shipwreck related by the minister of the King of Ceylon was well described. The personal bearings of some of the characters were particularly striking as those of King Vijay Varma and Ratnavali."

Another special feature of the theatre was the introduction of the national Orchestra on the basis of Indian instruments and it was Raja Jatindra Mohan who suggested this. The concert was played under the direction of Professor Kshetra Mohan Goswami, a genius in music and Babu Jadunath Pal led the band. Gosain for the first time put into notation some of the native tunes and rāgas and thus was the first Concert Band in Bengal known as the Belgachhia Amateur Band formed. Babu Gurudayal Chaudhury, disciple of the poet Iswar Gupta composed songs for the purpose.

Indeed, the music had so powerful and beneficial an effect upon the English gentlemen that one of them to whom the Anglo Indian Drama and music owe more than to any other English resident in India, remarked that it completely neutralised in his mind the prejudices which he had conceived against the Hindu music. There was little monotony and the airs complacently preserved the original character of the occasion.

As to dancing, the *Patriot* observes :

“We were, however, not a little surprised with the nice dancing which we witnessed. At first we mistook the dancers who played so wonderfully for nautch girls until we were disabused of our impression by authentic evidence. Indeed, they trimmed over the stage-ground so lightly and moved briskly that one not behind the scenes could scarcely forego the above conclusion.”

Then at the suggestion of his friend Babu Gorudas Bysak, Madhusudan was engaged by the Rajas to translate the play for the convenience of spectators, who could not understand Bengali. The translation was a masterpiece and few Englishmen, said the *Hurkaru*, could have written so chaste and beautiful English.

In this permanent stage of Belgachhia, *Ratnavali* alone was performed *twelve nights*, and this would not have been possible if the stage was a temporary one. Indeed, Belgachhia permanent Theatre marked a new era in the history of the Bengali Stage. It acted as a first great stimulus and henceforth theatres were started all over the country. The organisers have left a history behind and no greater compliment is possible than what was paid by Michael Madhusudan Dutt in the following significant words.

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- * 1. Gourdas Bysak's reminiscences.
2. Kisori Chand Mitter's article.

“Should the drama ever again flourish in India, posterity will not forget those noble gentlemen, the earliest friends of our rising National Theatre.”

Our readers will remember that the idea of a *National Theatre* came first from Madhu Sudan.

II. SARMISHTHA.

Ratnavali was followed by *Sarmistha* written for the aforesaid theatre by Michael Madhusudan Dutt, who, when *Sāgarikā* (*Ratnavali*) was losing attraction by repetition, came to the rescue with his first Bengali production. But the question is how could a Bengali drama come out from the pen of the Anglicised Bengali, who found it difficult even to spell the simple Bengali word *Prithivi* meaning the earth, rather prided in mis-spelling the word, confidently remarking to his friend Bhudev Mukherjee, that it must be *Prathini* and not *Prithivi*? The solution surely lies in the miracle of his genius more than with anything else.

It is said that when the rehearsal of *Ratnavali* had been going on, Madhusudan exclaimed to his friend Gourdas Bysak, another promoter thereof—“what a pity that the Rajas have spent such a lot of money over a miserable play.

I wish I had known of it before, as I could have given you a piece worthy of our theatre". Babu Gourdas laughed at these presumptuous words, but a genius like Madhusudan was not to be put out by laughter or cold sneer, and within a short space of time he brought to the astonishment of his friends, the above-mentioned drama which was successfully acted by the troupe on the 3rd September, 1859. Both Jatindra Mohan Tagore and Raja Iswar Chandra were principal organisers and the former composed some songs including the ode to *Siva* in the last act of the performance.

The dramatic cast was as follows

King Yayati	... Preonath Dutt (in rehearsal). (As his father died, the part of Raja was performed by Jadunath Chatterjee.)
Madhavya (Basantaka)	... Keshav Chandra Ganguly.
Mantri (minister)	... Nobin Chandra Mukherjee.
Sukracarya (Risi)	... Dina nath Ghose.
Kapil (His disciple)	... Sarat Chandra Ghose, (laterly of the Bengal Theatre).
Bakasur (general)	... Raja Iswar Chandra Singh.
Daitya (An officer)	... Tara Chand Guha.

[As the Raja fell from the back of his horse and his hand fractured, Tara Chand took the part of Bakasur and his part of Daitya was taken by Nritya Lal Das.]

Citizens	... Harish Chandra Mukherjee. Rasik Lal Shaw. Broja Lal Dutt.
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Courtiers	... Jatindra Mohan Tagore. The part was ultimately taken by Mahesh Chandra Chunder.
Darwan	... Jatindra Ghose, Raja's ... brother-in-law.
Devajani	... Hem Chandra Mukherjee, (Sagarika of <i>Ratnavali</i>)
Sarmistha	... Kristodhone Mukherjee, (a new-comer) a real acqui- sition.
Purnika	... Kalidas Sandel (in the former appeared as dancing girl).
Devika	... Aghore Chandra Digharia (Susangata).
Nata	Braja Durlabh Dutta.
Nati	... Chuni Lal Bose (as before).
Maidservant	... Kali Prasanna Mukerjee.
Dancing girls	... The same as before, plus Bankim Chandra Mukherjee. *

Though Raja Iswar Chandra doubted whether *Sarmistha* would be as popular as *Ratnavali*, it was indeed a great success and the newspapers of the time spoke highly of the performance.

Madhu, too was present in the performance and wrote to his friend Babu Rajnarain Bose about its successful representation :

* From a letter, 24th March, 1859 of Raja Iswar Chandra fixing the cast and written to Gourdas Bysak. *Vide, Madhusudan's Biography*, p. 233 by Jogindra Nath Bose.

Vide also Anusilan and Purohit, 1302, Jyaistha, Rangabhumir Itivritta.

“When *Sarmistha* was acted at Belgachhia, the impression it created was simply indescribable. Even the least romantic spectator was charmed by the character of *Sarmistha* and shed tears with her. As for my own feelings, they were “things to dream of, not to tell.” Poor old Ram Chandra (Babu Ram Chandra Mitra, the veteran old teacher of the Hindu College) was half mad and grasped my hand saying “why, dear Madhu, my dear Madhu, this does you great credit indeed ; Oh it is beautiful.”

How the enlightened public appreciated the performance, will be evident from the review in the *Hindu Patriot* (September 10, 1859) :—

“The elegant private theatre of the Rajahs of Paikpara opened Saturday last at their Belgatchhia villa with the performance of the *Sarmista*, a serio-comic drama by Mr. Michael M. S. Dutt. The drama is based on classic story of the Mahabharata, illustrating with great effect two very interesting morals of human life.

“The period of the drama transports us back to Indian society as it was two thousand years ago and we are glad to state that the scenic arrangements and the accoutrements of the *Corps dramatique* pictured forth with a marvellous accuracy the Indian life, habitudes and usages of that distant age. Our antiquarian friends present on the occasion bore cheerful testimony to their accuracy. The *habiliments* of the Sage *Sukracharya* flowing from neck to foot tinged with mud green colour approximating in sombreness to the covering sheet of an Egyptian Mummy adorning the Calcutta Asiatic

Museum, and withal beautifully attesting to the austere life of the *Riszi*, in marked contrast to the costume of our Capuchins of the present day were an object of particular admiration to them. The court was splendidly represented, the courtiers observing a fidelity of manner and bearing, which those who accuse our countrymen of deficiency in either, ought to have witnessed to disabuse themselves of their erroneous ideas.

“The performance, we are happy to be able to remark, was not charged with any appreciable exaggeration. A free and full scope was afforded to nature and if the outset wanted a little in life and animation, it was more than compensated for by the unusually exciting interest, which the play created as it neared the conclusion. This time, as on the past occasion, the jester was the soul of the corps. The genial play of his fancy, his exquisite humour and his frolics, his appropriate apothegms unobtrusively introduced in the midst of quiet laughter, and his merry consideration of self, undisguised and always enlivening were always welcome and often exciting. There was so much freedom, life, grace and nature about him that we can boldly declare, he will do equal justice to the Boards of Paris or London. The other characters comforted themselves as agreeably to the audience as creditably to themselves. They were particularly observant of decorum, seldom transgressing the modesty of nature,”

Sarmistha is important from other points of view also. It marks the epoch when Bengali

Dramas began to just come into being. Madhusudan also introduced some innovations and was practically the pioneer to secede from the old Sanskrit school of drama. *Bhadrarjun* was rather too insignificant a drama to draw any notice of the people, and, we have also seen, Kaliprasanna Sinha was gradually receding from the old model, but it was Madhusudan, who gave the last blow. From the very beginning Madhusudan tried to discard old Sanskrit models and classical conventions. In the preface to the translation of *Ratnavali* Madhusudan wrote "A host of writers, who discard Sanskrit Models and look to higher sources for inspiration."

Mahamahopadhyaya Premchand Tarkavagish, the famous Sanskritist of that time, going through the manuscript copy of Madhusudan's *Sarmistha* remarked "It is no drama, perhaps it is the production of a young Babu having a knowledge of English ; any corrections made would necessitate the change of the book as a whole." Madhu, on the other hand, required no help from a Sanskrit dramatist and wanted to stand or fall by himself. Thus he writes to his friend Gourdas Bysak :

"I am aware, my dear fellow, that there will, in all likelihood, be something of a foreign air about my drama and that it is my intention to throw off the fetters forged for us by a servile taste of everything Sanskrit."

Madhu, however, could not shake himself off from all the old technique and formalities, but

taking everything into consideration, Madhusudan may be considered to be the pioneer showing a new path, which was henceforth to be followed by later dramatists.

The opening song was composed by Madhusudan himself. It throws a light on his attitude of mind then uppermost in him, to see dramatic art reaching a high standard of moral excellence, and it also gives a hint about the low standard of dramatic literature then prevalent. Thus it runs :

“O, mother India, how long will you remain in slumber ? There was a time when dramatic art was in ascendancy in India but it is almost dead now. Where are the poets Vālmīki, Vyāsa Kālidasa and Bhavabhuti ? I cannot bear the sight of the sons of Bengal being charmed by dramas of evil taste. They drink poison, leaving aside nectar. I invoke thee, oh mother, to awake and enthuse good taste in them :

Mari hay kotha se sukher samay,
Ye samay, desamay, natyaras savises chhila
rasamay.

Sona go bharatabhumi kata nidra yave tumi,
Ar nidra uchit na hay.

Utha tyaja ghumaghor, haila haila bhor,
Dinakar prachite uday.

Kothay Valmiki Vyas, kotha taba Kalidasa,
Kotha Bhavabhuti mahoday,

Alik kunatyarange, maje loka Rarhe Bange
Nirakhiya prane nahi shay.

Sudharasa anadare, Visabari pana kare,
tathe hai tanu, mana ksyaya,

Madhu kahe jago ma go, vibhusthane ei mago,
surase pravitra ha'k taba tanayanichay

Sarmistha really put Madhu at the head of the Bengali authors and it was considered by the people of Bengal as the *best Bengali drama*,* hitherto published in Bengali.

Madhu himself wrote out a translation of the same for the English-speaking audience.

The last performance of *Sarmistha* in the Belgachhia Theatre was on September 22, 1859 as was noticed in the *Bengal Hurkaru* of Tuesday, September 29, 1859 :

“The *Sarmistha* was performed for the last time, we understand, before the holidays on Tuesday evening last, at the little private Theatre..... Among the company were present The Hon'ble Sir J. P. Grant. Lt. Governor of Begal, Mr. & Mrs. J. P. Grant Junior, Dr. and Mrs. Mc Pherson, Major Plowden, Private Secretary to Lieutenant Governor, Mr. C. Piffard and Dr. H. P. Hinde of the Supreme Court Bar, Mr. Site Apcar, Moonshi Ameer Ali of Patna notoriety, Babu Rajendra Lal Mitter a numerous and fashionable audience from the depot at Dum Dum and many other native and European gentlemen.”

The above plays *Kulinkulasarvasva*, *Sakuntala*, *Vikramorboshi*, *Ratnavali* and *Sarmistha*, inaugurated a new epoch in the history of the dramatic literature in Bengal, about which Rev.

Dr. Rajendra Lal Mitra's 'Bibidhartha Sangraha'
samkhyā 58, Saka 1780, Magha.

J. Long did not forget to mention in his report to the Government of Bengal in 1859, in following words :

“A taste for Dramatic Exhibition has lately revived among the educated Hindus, who find that translations of the Ancient Hindu Dramas are more valuable than translations from English Plays.....Foremost among the persons of the Drama are Raja Pratap Chander Singh and a young Zeminder Kali Prasanna Singh.”

Madhusudan's second drama was *Padmavati* written after the Greek legends. Its Śachī, Ratī, Nārada, Rājā Indranil and the princess Padmavati are copied from the Greek Juno, Venus, Discordia, Paris and Helen of Homer's Iliad, with of course some difference in representation of art and character in a way characteristic of Madhu's genius. Madhu expected it to be staged at the Belgachhia, but it could not be so done.

Madhusudan next wrote the farcical comedies *Eke i ki Bale Sabhyata* (Is this civilization) and *Burusaliker Ghare Row* in the same year, i. e., in 1860. The former exposes the habits of *Young Bengal* and the latter mercilessly does of the hypocrites, who put on a sanctimonious air. Most of these religious frauds like *Bhaktaprasad* of the latter farce are really licentious and avaricious.

As to Madhusudan's dramas opinion is divided, but the farces have been very highly spoken of by all classes of people including even the most fastidious critic. We quote below the

observations of a writer, who is authentically traced by some writers as the renowned Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, that appeared in the *Calcutta Review* of 1871 (Vol. 52) as a review to the work of Babu Hara Mohan Mukerjee :—

“As a dramatist Mr. Dutt is not successful. Among his plays are *Sarmistha*, *Padmavati* and *Krisna kumari* and the first-mentioned in particular is very generally admired. In our judgment none of them are of much value and his undoubted poetic genius seems to divert him as soon as he sets about writing a play. His farces, however, are good, one of them entitled *Is this civilization* is best in the language. This little work deserves notice independently of its great merit. The Bengali Press at the present day is very prolific, but by far the largest part of the books published are mere servile imitations of some successful author. There are imitations of Vidyasagore, imitations of Tek Chand Thakur, of Dina Bandhu Mitra, of the author of *Durges nandini*, but perhaps no work has formed the model for so many imitators as *Is this civilization*. It is a farce with a purpose being intended chiefly to ridicule and so expose the vice of drunkenness and other evils by which it is generally attended.

This little work, therefore, independently of its being in itself one of the best farces in the language joins the additional importance from the large number of other books written after its model.

To give an adequate idea of this clever little work

by translated extracts would be entirely impossible, because half the fun lies in the absurd Jargon interlaced with English words and the cant of debating clubs in which the characters speak. The scene is laid in the *Jnanataram-gini Sabha*, a sort of scientific debating society, which chiefly devoted itself to nautch girls and tippling. The types of life and character, which it represents, are sufficiently disgusting and the important question is whether the representation is correct.

To the ~~shame~~ name of Bengal we must say that we fear the picture is a true one.

The reformer, who never gets beyond tipsy, harangues full of English expressions, should not be confounded, as he often is, by Europeans with the really civilised class. But it cannot be denied that he is a fair representation of the great horde of partly educated Babus, whose only claim to enlightenment lies in the fact that they drink, wear shabby trousers and stammer out barbarous English. These are the men, who swarm in every office and plague officials with endless applications for employment, crowd the thoroughfares of the native town in the evening, drain the liquor shops and form the majority of his audience when Babu Keshav Chandra Sen lectures in the Town Hall. Of education they have had nothing worth the name. Having spent a few years very profitably in learning smattering of English at home or Anglo-vernacular school, they started in life, if poor, at the age of eighteen as *umedwars*, if rich, they devoted themselves from the same age with their whole strength

to swinish pleasures. The country is over-run with men of this sort and Mr. Dutt's picture is true in life but they must not be confounded with the really cultivated class, who, inspite of all that has been said regarding the English education, are comparatively few in number.

'The other farce also describes the vices of a man who poses as a pious man but was a debauch within.'

The above review appeared during the lifetime of Madhusudan, and so far as the farces are concerned, the above remarks are justly true : but as regards the dramas, we humbly differ. Madhu's dramas did not find recognition in the first stage, as the Sanskrit School of critics, by far the largest at the time, found him a renegade from the established school of dramas and the Bankim school too wanted a dramatist of higher standard like Marlow or Shakespeare's and as Madhu could not satisfy either class, he had few friends to admire him though his dramas, especially *Krishnakumari*, had much of dramatic excellence in them. Indeed, Madhusudan was the pioneer and may very well be considered as the best of the dramatists of the earliest history of Bengali dramas.

Is this civilization was also very highly spoken of by the *Hindu Patriot*, July 31, 1860 :

"This farce is undoubtedly one of the happiest reproductions of the fertile brain of the gifted poet. It is a life-like picture of Young Bengal full of sallies of wit and humour and written in familiar graceful Bengali."

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Now as to why these farces, though written for the Belgachhia Theatre, could not be acted there, we would better quote from the reminiscences of Babu Keshav Chandra Ganguly about Madhusudan. The following account, taken from the *Biography* of the poet, will greatly interest our readers* :

“After the farces were written by Madhusudan for the Belgachhia Theatre and were subsequently printed at the expense of the Rajas of Paikpara and the characters were cast, the rehearsals commenced. But an adverse circumstance occurred, which prevented their being brought on the stage.

“A few of the young Bengal class getting a scent of the farce “*Eke i ki Bale Sabhyata* and seeing that the caricature made in it touched them too closely, raised a hue and cry and choosing for their leader a gentleman of position and influence, who they knew, had some influence with the Rajas deputed him to dissuade them from producing the farce on the Board of the Theatre. This gentleman (also a young Bengal) fought tooth and nail for the success of his mission.”

“The Rajas would not yield at first, but under great pressure were obliged to give up the farce. Raja Iswar Chandra Singh was so disgusted at this affair that he resolved not

* Madhusudan's *Biography*, 2nd Edition, p.32-33, *Parisista*.

only to give up the other farce, but to have no more Bengali plays acted at the Belgachhia Theatre. This circumstance was not known to our friend Michael, who pestered me with repeated enquiries, why the farces were not taken up in earnest by the Belgachhia Dramatic Corps. Is it because we think that they were not well written? I could only give him an evasive reply saying that as one farce exposes the faults and failings of *Young Bengal* and the other, those of the old Hindus, and as the Rajas were popular with both the classes, they did not wish to offend either class by having them acted in theatre. The above incident however, so much disgusted Raja Iswar Chandra that he made every representation for having some English farces acted on the Boards of the Belgachhia Theatre.* And rehearsals actually commenced with the Raja himself, Dr. Rajendra Lal Mitter, Babu Keshav Chandra Ganguly Babu Dinanath Ghose and others, but as Babu Jatindra Mohan Tagore was opposed to the acting of English plays or farces on the Boards of the Bengali Theatre, the project fell through and the theatre was practically suspended."

Madhu next composed a drama *Subhadra*,

* Jatindra Mohan in a letter, dated 22nd May, 1860, writes to Madhu saying, "I am led to believe that the Rajas will have no more Bengali plays at the Belgachhia.", *Michael's Biography*, page 266,

which he did not intend for the stage, as it was simply a dramatic poem. He then culled out his subject from the Pathan History and set upon himself to write a piece under the name of *Rezia*, daughter of King Altamash of the Slave Dynasty, as he thought, "Mahomedans are a fiercer race than ourselves and would afford splendid opportunity for the display of passion," and sent a synopsis of the play to Babu Keshav Chandra Ganguly, Maharaja Jatindra Mohan Tagore and Raja Iswar Chandra Singh for consideration if it could be acted at the Belgachhia Theatre. They however, thought that Mahomedan names would not hear well in a Bengali drama and too many female characters therein could not be well represented. Keshav, however, thought, the history of the Rajputs would afford materials for a proper drama. Madhu took the subject in right earnest and within a space of *one month's time from August 6 to September 7, 1860*, finished his drama *Krisnakumari Natak*. This book, as we have seen, was dedicated to Babu Keshav Chandra Ganguly.

Madhu wanted it, as he said, his heart was set upon seeing it, to be acted at Belgachhia. He wanted Mr. Ganguly to see the Chhota Raja (Raja Iswar Chandra) with Dinonath and Jatindra Mahan and mildly threatened saying, "Mind, you all broke my wings once about the farces ; if you play a similar trick this time, I shall forswear Bengali and write books in Hebrew or Chinese."

But Raja Iswar Chandra was unmovable partly for his illness and partly for the previous disappointment and the theatre soon became the "abode of Bats". In vain Madhusudan tried for its revival and in a letter to Mr. Keshab Ganguly he wrote :

"It strikes me, that if the Drama is to be acted as it has not received even a moderate degree of development in this country, you had better at once organise your company and begin operations with the two acts printed. Go on rehearsing at Jatindra's and then you can settle whether we are to do the thing in the Town Theatre or blaze out at dear old Belgachhia—I vote for Belgachhia."

Madhu also selected the cast putting the role of Dhanadās in the hands of Keshav, but he was sorry to find as he wrote, "I am afraid, brother Keshav, we are losing that fine enthusiasm we once had in matters dramatic" and was stirring his friend in the words,—“If the Rajas of Paikpara are bent upon shutting their doors against Sarasvati, I hope, the poor Goddess will still find a warm friend in Babu Jatindra Mohan Tagore.”

But alas ! the continued illness and the sad and untimely death of Raja Iswar Chandra, a prince amongst men, on the 29th March, 1861, put an end to the project for ever. The Belgachhia, the first permanent stage of Bengal, was thus broken up, leaving its memory for good. There is no trace of the stage now, but the

memories of Raja brothers, Jatindra Mohan Tagore, Keshav Chandra Ganguly, and above all, Madhusudan Dutt and his farce, *Is this civilization*, written for it, will ever remain fresh in the minds of every Bengalee, so long as civilization remains with us.

The songs of *Krisnakumari* were composed by Maharaja Jatindra Mohan, who, on this occasion as before, bore the cost of printing of the drama. This is the first Bengali tragedy in the dramatic literature of Bengal and the *Hindu Patriot* of February 1867, writes thus :

“This is the best and original drama in the Bengali language familiar with the richest treasures of the dramatic Literature of Europe and India. Our author had enriched his mother tongue with a production, which would bear comparison with the first class dramas of the ancient and modern classics. Written in chaste Bengali with a plot admirably developed, the characters beautifully fitting into each other and possessed of an antique grandeur, *Krisnakumari* if it had not been stamped with imprint of a modern press and name of a modern writer, would have passed as one of those master-productions of poetic genius, which have won for ancient India such an eminent place in the republic of letters.”

This is not the place to criticise about the Dramatic merits of Madhusudan's genius, but it is undeniable that his pen produced the first successful Pourāṇik Drama, * the first tragedy,

* We have already mentioned about *Kirtibilas* and *Bhagararjun Natak*.

the first historical drama and as a social sketch the first farce that has remained unsurpassed by any writer even until this day and it is he, who dreamt of National Theatre, hoped for it and before his death saw its birth and wrote dramas for it. So long as Bengali Drama and Theatre will have its history, Madhusudan's name will ever be remembered with sincere gratefulness by his countrymen.

REV. KESHAV CHANDRA ON THE STAGE

Drama exercised such a fascination over the country that almost all her gifted sons took an active interest in it, and of them Rev. Keshav Chandra Sen, the illustrious preacher, was one. The name of Keshav is a bye-word amongst the educated Bengalees for his great oratorial powers, superb eloquence and the supreme gifts of carrying everything before him, like whom Europe has scarcely seen a dozen of preachers since the spread of Christianity in the west. In his student days, Keshav was a great lover of drama, who with his friend and associate Rev. Brother Pratap Chandra Mazumder, a great orator (to these orations America bore many eloquent testimonies of appreciation and praise) and Babu Narendra Nath Sen (afterwards the famous editor of the Indian Mirror, who never faltered to speak the truth face to face even to an angry Viceroy) figured

as Hamlet, Leartes and Ophelia respectively in the performance of *Hamlet* in English at their native village Garifa. This was in 1857 or thereabout, when *Sakuntala* and other Bengali dramas were being staged.

The other parts were represented as follows :

Horatio	...	Akshay Kumar Mazumder,
Polinius	...	Bhola Nath Chakraverty.
Barnardo	...	Jogendra Nath Sen.
King	...	Mahendra Nath Sen.
Queen	...	Nanda Lal Das.

An interesting and faithful account of the performance may be gathered from the well-known book, "Life and teachings of Keshav Sen" by Rev. Pratap Chandra Mazumder, pp. 101-102 :

"A Stage was improvised, castway-European clothes were speedily procured from the bearers and we painted our faces as best as we could. Keshav played Hamlet most successfully, he had the constitution of the Danish Prince by nature, The present writer took the part of Leartes, while Narendra Nath Sen, who had thin girlish voice at the time, played Ophelia very feelingly. Considering our age and training, the performance was successful. We kept up the play from time to time, till Keshav's theatrical propensities developed into the *Vidhavavivaha Natak*, a little while afterwards."

As to the performance of the second drama *Vidhava-vivaha Natak*, the same writer gives an

interesting and faithful account as follows in pages 114-16 of his book :

“In the splendid building at Chitpore Road to which the Brahma School was removed in 1859, Keshav found a somewhat unexpected occupation. He was entrusted with the management of an institution very different from the Brahma School. It was a Dramatic Club to put on the stage *Vidhavabivaha Natak* (Widow-marriage Drama) written with the object of reforming the cruel custom of the forced celibacy of young Hindu widows. By repeated representation of Hamlet and other performances half musical, half dramatic, Keshav had developed such a talent for stage-management that the gentlemen, who projected this company, most of them our relatives and neighbours, senior to us in age, implicitly trusted Keshav with the sole charge of the new undertaking. Keshav's love for Shakespeare and for good dramas in general was unbounded, it was one of these dispositions, which his early asceticism never wholly effaced, strange as that may seem, and which adhered to him till the last day of his life.

“He always looked upon dramatic representation not only as a most enlightened form of public amusement but also as a most potent agency for the reformation of social evils. Abstemious in his own personal habits, he never grudged to the community its legitimate share of rational recreation. Natural innocent joyousness he held to be the safety-valve of a hundred ill-humours in the human mind also

as a great force by which an individual and a nation might be raised to the most exalted ideals. To all these motives were added the intense sympathy he felt with the marriage of Hindu widows. Since the inauguration of the widow marriage reform in 1856, * Keshav, though then a very young man, wished well to the cause and did what he could do to contribute to its success. He, therefore, cheerfully accepted the management of the Widow marriage Drama. Four institutions now ran abreast each other under Keshav's supervision. There was the Colootola Evening School, the Good Will Fraternity, the Brahma School, and the Theatre at Chitpore Road. As nearly the same individuals comprised the staff of them all, it was sometimes amusing and perplexing to hear the several bells ring almost simultaneously for the classes of the first, the services of the second, lecture of the third and rehearsals of the fourth.

The plot of the drama was the miserable life of a Hindu widow, shut in the Zenana, who, in her solitary friendless condition, formed an attachment to a young neighbour by whom she was led to course of sin. The concluding scenes depicted her sufferings, her suicide, her confessions with appeals to all patriotic men, to put an end to the forced celibacy of Hindu widows. The performance was first opened to

* In 1855, a society for the reformation of Hindu customs with Kisori Chand Mitter as secretary was formed, where Pandit Iswar Chandra Vidya-sagore now and then used to read pamphlets.

the public in the begining of 1859 and produced a sensation in Calcutta, which, those who witnessed it, can never forget. The representatives of the highest classes of Hindu society were present. The pioneer and father of the widow marriage movement Pandit Iswar came more than once, and tender-hearted as he was, was moved to floods of tears. In fact, there was scarcely a dry eye in the great audience : undoubtedly the most wholesome effect was produced. Keshav, as stage-manager, was warmly complimented on his energy and intelligence and we, his friends, as amateur actors, who had done our best, also received our humble share of praise, Though his dramatic success brought Keshav a good deal before the public in that dawn and flash of his spiritual character, the occupation of a stage manager could not but soon grow uncongenial. He and his companions were often thrown into heterogenous company ; some of the parts played were undoubtedly harmful in their moral tendency ; there was inevitable dissipation, frivolity and a dangerous love of public applause. So before the end of the year the Theatre was given up completely and Keshav turned his attention to more serious and important subjects."

The above drama in Bengali was from the pen of late Babu Umesh Chanra Mitra, who treated the social question admirably * and the place of its performance was at Sinduria Pati (Chitpore Road) near Canning Street at the house

* *Citizen*, June 26, 1859.

of Babu Gopal Lal Mullick. The Theatre was called the Metropolitan Theatre after the name of the Hindu Metropolitan College, which had been located here† There had been an attempt by Babu Behari Lal Sett to stage it in May 1858 but some how or other it fell through till the Garifa sens took it up.

The *Hurkara* ‡ gives an account that on April 27, 1859, the audience numbered 500 persons, performance commencing at 8 p.m. and closed at 3 a.m. and the part performed by a Tol Pandit, Tarkā-laṅkāṛ and by Sukhamayi, elicited most admiration and that the stage scens were well got up, and that thanks were due to the proprietor Muralidhar Sen.

The cast was as follows :

Kirtiram Ghose	... Mahendra Nath Sen.
Manmatha	... Rev. Pratap Chandra Mazumdar.
Rama Kanta	... Prof. Krishna Biheri Sen (brother of Keshav Chandra Sen),
Guru Mahasaya	... Haran Chandra Mazumdar.
Ramdev	... Akshay Chandra Mazumdar.

† It is now at the Sankar Ghose Lane, under the name of the Vidyasagar College.

‡ Another drama of a similar nature with *Vidhavavivaha Natak* by Umacharan Chatterjee was to be acted in the northern part of the town at Kansaripara in the house of a Bania, Manindra Lal Dutt, *Bengal Hurkaru*, May 21, 1857.

Bridegroom	... Yadav Chandra Roy.
Sulochana	... Behari Lal Chatterjee.
Padmavati	... Gopal Chandra Sen.
Daughter - in - law	
Sukhumayi	... Narendra Nath Sen.
Rasavati	... Rakhal Chandra Sen.

The part of Sulochanā was so splendidly done that the people doubted whether the part was really acted by a man or a woman, but *Hurkaru* hoped that female parts should be represented by persons of that sex.

It is said that songs composed by Dwaraka Nath Roy were set to tune by Babu Radhika Prasad Dutt,* who composed the concert along with Umesh Chandra, Kshetra Bose, Panchanan Mitra, Gadadhar Mitra, Rasik Mukherjee and Beni Madhav Bose.

We have another social drama under the name of *Nava Vrindavan* under the auspices of Keshav Chandra Sen, in the name of Chiranjiv Sarma (Trailokya Nath Sanyal). It was staged first in September 1881, when Keshav Babu himself took the part of *Pahari Vava* and of *Bajikar* and Narendra Nath afterwards Swami Vivekananda the Dandi disciple. This drama has often been acted and the last performance we saw, was at the Victoria Institution in 1916, when Babu Dines Chandra Das an important figure in Talkies but now no more, took the part of Avinas and Mr. S. Sen (son of Keshav Babu) that of Pāhāri Vāvā. *Indian Mirror* also reports about a subsequent performance of the drama, in 1882†.

* *Prabhakara* 14th may, 1859.

† *Indian Mirror*. 23rd September, 1882.

Chapter IV

DINABANDHU ERA

AND

The East Bengal Stage

Next, we shall speak about a drama which brought about a great national awakening in the province. The drama was the well-known piece *Niladarpana* and the dramatist was no other person than the great Dinabandhu Mitra, the period of whose domineering influence as the dramatist, was known as the *Dinabandhu Era*. The performance of the *Niladarpana Natak* was a memorable incident in the history and development of the Bengali Stage. The honour of frequently staging the drama and thereby exposing to the public high-handedness of the oppressive Indigo planters belonged, however, to the "East Bengal Stage", *Purvabanga-Rangabhumi* of Dacca, which greatly helped the cause of national agitation that shook then the province of Bengal from one end to the other. It is, however, providential that the first national drama by Dinabandhu (friend of the poor) was staged in the native district of the great national leader Deshabandhu, or the friend of the country.

It was about the time of the Sepoy mutiny

that the oppression of the Indigo planters reached its climax and in the words of Rev. James Long "a reign of terror existed." An Indigo commission was appointed by Sir J. P. Grant, Lt. Governor, in 1860 with Mr. W. S. Seton-Karr as Secretary, to enquire into the grievances of the ryots (Prajā) and the great patriotic editor Babu Harish Chandra Mukherjee rendered invaluable services by writing columns after columns every day about the inhuman oppression of the planters. It was at this time, in September, 1860, Dinabandhu exhibited in graphic colours the horrors of the planters over the helpless ryots of Bengal, how the poor peasantry was being cruelly ground every day under that heartless system. His drama was, in fact, the *Mirror*, as its name *Darpana* signifies, that held up the full reflection of the oppression and tortures practised by the haughty and defiant planters. Dinabandhu did not dare to subscribe his name as the author, but the book read as being "written by a certain traveller for the good of ryots, suffering from the bite of the Cobra de capello in the form of the Indigo planter."*

The author's experiences were only reflected in the *Mirror*, as the greatest literary genius of

* The first edition of the book shows that the date of publication was 2nd Aswin, 1782 (Saka Era), printed by Ramchandra Bhowmik at Bangala Jantra (Press), Dacca.

that time, Bankim Chandra, writes as follows :†

“In consequence of Government work he had to travel from Manipore to Ganjam and from Darjeeling to seas...he had to go from village to village...he had extraordinary power of mixing with people and he used to mix gladly with people of all classes. He knew intimately low caste villagers’ daughters like Kshetramani, old village women like Aduri, village ryots like Torap, Dewans of Indigo Factory, Amins etc. In *Niladarpana*, author’s experience and sympathy combined in full measure and it was the most powerful of all his dramas.....”

Indeed, Kshetramani of the drama was none but Haramoni, a peasant girl of Nuddea in flesh and blood, known as one of the beauties of Krishnagar, who was carried off to the Kulchikatta factory, in charge of Archibald Hills, the Chhota Saheb, where the girl was kept in his bed-room till late hours of the night, and the kind Magistrate of Amarnagore in the drama was no other person than Mr. W. J. Herschel, grandson of the great astronomer, and Act XI was nothing but the cruel summary procedure, which Nabin Madhav, a character in the drama, describes as a *Cruel Law* and Revati, another character, remarks that under this law,

† Vide, Biographical sketch of Dinabandhu by Sahitya Samrat Bankim Chandra Chatterjee.

no appeal lies against conviction. ("Pil Hoi nā")*

Mr. R. C. Dutt, I.C.S., C.I.E. also speaks about the drama :†

"Dinobandhu, who was born in Chamberia village in the Nuddea District, had ample opportunities to note the doings of the planters and their subordinates.

"At last, in 1860, he published his first dramatic work *Nildarpana* anonymously, bringing together facts and incidents, which had come up to his observation and weaving them into the plot with the skill of a true artist."

Now Dacca, the place of birth of this famous drama, gave quite a befitting representation of this epoch-making play, and its modes and sentiments at once took the country by storm, The *Hurkaru* ‡ speaks both about the drama and its performance :

"Our native friends entertain themselves with occasional theatrical performances and *the Nildarpana* was acted on one of these occasions."

The effect of the drama and its performance was electrifying and it roused a wave of indignation through the length and breadth of the country as the following remarks of the famous scholar,

* Indigo Commission Proceedings.

† "The Literature of Bengal," Chapter XVII
Dramatic writers.

‡ *Hurkaru*, 12th June, 1861, A correspondent of Dacca.

preacher and author, Pandit Shiv Nath Sastri, will show :

“When the celebrated patriot Harish Chandra Mukherjee took up his pen in the *Hindu Patriot*, the planters’ Citadel of Sin trembled. When the people’s minds were thus excited, then was published Dinabandhu Mitter’s celebrated drama *Niladarpana*. We shall never forget the upheaval which it caused in Bengali Society. All of us, children, old men and women, became almost mad. It was the talk in every home and in every lodging was its representation ; Bengal began to quake from one end to the other, as if from the effects of seismic shock: As the result of this great upheaval, the oppression of the Indigo planters vanished for ever from Bengal.”*

Nor was the response confined to Bengal alone. There were arrangements for the performance of the drama in Bombay also. So says the *Hindu Patriot* :

“We learn from the *Times of India* that the Editor of the *Bombay Samachar Darpan* has completed arrangements to bring the *Niladarpana* on the stage of the Grant Road Theatre. Is there no editor of the *Englishman* type there

* Vide, Bengali essay *National Awakening* and also *The Indigo Disturbance—National Literature* compiled by Babu Lalit Ch. Mitra.

to bring the libel-treating Editor to his bearing ?”*

The above refers to the prosecution of Rev. J. Long at the instance of Mr. Walter Brett, editor *Englishman*, for libel, about which we ought to give here a short account.

Several gentlemen of education and position wanted to have the book translated into English for the information of those, who were ignorant of the Bengali language, but who should be acquainted with the true state of national feeling on the subject and Mr. Seton-Karr, Chief Secretary to the Government of Bengal, struck with the thorough appreciation of village life which the drama displayed, gave sanction to the work being translated into English. Rev. Long had it done through Michael Madhusudan Dutt of *Sarmistha* fame, in August 1861 and 500 copies of this translation were sent to the Bengal office and out of these 202 copies were sent to England under official seal, and only 14 copies were circulated in India. Rev. J. Long wrote a very able preface to that translation and published it in his own name.

The landowners and the Commercial Association backed the Indigo planters and Mr. Walter Brett, then Editor of the *Englishman*, who was all along with the Editor of the *Hurkaru* described in preface to the drama “as

* *Hindu Patriot*, 5th Sept., 1861.

having sold themselves for Rs. 1000/-like Judas Iscariot, who betrayed Jesus to the Roman Pontius Pilate for few pieces of silver coins," at first brought a libel action against the printer Mr. C. H. Manual, who was fined Rs. 10/-by the Supreme Court of Calcutta for his having admitted liability. Then a libel suit was brought against Rev. Long himself. The case was heard at the Criminal Sessions of the Calcutta High Court, presided over by Sir Mordaunt Wells on the 19th July, 1861.* Mr. Long admitted his connection with the work and presented a long statement in justification of his sympathy with the movement, describing therein how the drama was a genuine expression of the popular feeling and the effect of indigo-planting was as ruinous as the drama represented. The Judge, however, went out of his way to denounce both Mr. Long and the work, describing the latter as *foul and disgusting libel*. From the following instance quoted in *the Hurkaru* from a passage of *Nila-darpana*, it is curious how he interpreted the facts :

There is a conversation between Dāragā and Zamādār where the former asks :

"Did not the Magistrate say that he will come here this day ?"

* Messrs. Paterson and Cowie appeared for the prosecution, and Messrs. Eglinton and Mew-march for the defence.

Zamādār :—No, Sir he had four days more to come. At Sachinagore on Saturday they have a *Champagne* party and ladies' dance. Mrs. Wood can never dance with any other but our Saheb, and I saw that, when I was a bearer. Mrs. Wood is very kind ; through the influence of the latter, she gave me the zamadary of the Jail.

The Judge in his charge directed the jury about the passage that it tended to make the insinuation against the whole body of Indigo-planters, that they did by such means exercise an undue influence over the Magistrates of the districts and that their wives were in the habit of debasing themselves in the manner suggested. Mr. Long repudiated the suggestion that it was too far-fetched to draw such an inference and that as a missionary his conduct was dictated by his religion and conscience which, he said, convicted him of no moral offence or of any offence deserving the language used in his Lordship's charge to the jury.

- * A correspondent of the *Hindu Patriot* wrote :—
 “Are these Magistrates fit men to govern we millions, when they can not resist the temptation of dining with the planters, and talking with their wives and dancing with them.”

Selections from the Records of Bengal Government No. III. Page 792. The Hakims surrounded by the planters sit along with them while deciding cases and the court is crowded with Amlahs and the Mokhters of the planters.

The judge, however, sentenced him on July 24, 1861 to one month's simple imprisonment and to pay a fine of Rs. 1000/-.

Immediately after the sentence was passed, Mr. Long was heard to say "What I have done now, I will do again". The fine was immediately paid by Babu Kali Prasanna Sinha of *Mahabharata* and *Vidyotsahini* fame, though many others were quite eager to do the same.

The above persecution, as the *Hindu Patriot** observed, could only be compared with the judicial murder of Nandakumar, more so in the arbitrariness of the Bench and Mr. Justice Wells, a true incarnation of arrogant, haughty and Bengali-hating Englishmen has been deservedly called "Impey of the Nineteenth Century,"

To us it appears that the Judge erred in holding that Wood and Rose, atrocious characters as they were, were described as types of their class. The piece was no more libel than *Oliver Twist* or *Nicholas Nickleby* of Dickens, *Maria Monk's* confession, *Harriet Becher Stowe's* work "*Uncle Tom's Cabin*" or the works of the famous Moliere,

The incarceration of this revered and benevolent Christian gentleman, a courageous and a loyal servant of the Church, evoked so much public sympathy that the Hindu community

under the leadership of Rajah Radhakanta Dev held a meeting at his Natmandir on the 29th August, 1861, passed a resolution for the recall of that Judge and sent it to His Excellency the Viceroy, protesting against the indiscriminate attacks made by the Judge on the character of the nation as a whole, to which a reply was communicated to Babu Jatindra Mohan Tagore (afterwards Maharajah), then the Honorary Secretary to the British Indian Association having stated that though judicial officers should be careful that their denunciations of crime might not be interpreted into hasty imputations against a whole people or community, but in the present case such imputations were not intended.

This prosecution was the first political case of its kind in India and the first national drama was the subject of the indictment.

Popular feeling of indignation was exceptionally strong and its expressions were frequent in rhymes and songs. One of such songs ran as follows:

“Harish is prematurely cut off, Long has been clapped into prison, and the Indigo monkies are bringing ruin upon the golden land of Bengal—

*“Asamaye Haris mailo
Longer hailo karagar,
Nilbandare sonar Bangla,
Kalle bhai chharkhar.”*

Mr. Long's publication was not the only one translation but we hear of other translations of the drama, called by F. H. Skrine, as a sort of Uncle Tom's Cabin, and the *Hindu Patriot*,* mentions one as follows:

"The London Special of the *Hurkaru* states that Messrs. Simkim Marshall and Co., have published the *Niladarpana* in London. Pity, the justice of Sir Mordaunt Wells cannot reach these enterprising publishers."

The drama was, also, as Bankim Chandra writes, translated into other languages of Europe.

The *Calcutta Review*, however, gave an unjust estimate of the drama. It gives it "a very low place as a work of art." *The importance*, says the writer in it, "was political and not literary, and as literature rather than politics is our present theme, we shall not discuss it at great length." We do not agree with this remark but consider along with Bankim Chandra that it was excellent as a piece of dramatic art too.

Niladarpana was followed by *Sadhavar Ekadasi*, *Navin Tapnsvini*, *Kamale Kamini*, *Bie Pagla Buro* and *Jamai Barik†* and in realism and action Dinabandhu surpassed even Madhusudan. The rapid passing of the age from Ramnarain to Madhusudan and from Madhu to Dinabandhu is really an interesting development and our readers should carefully notice this.

* *Hindu Patriot*, 26th May, 1862.

* *Calcutta Review*, Vol 52, 1871.

† We shall deal with these later on.

Chapter V

THREE ARISTOCRATIC THEATRES

1. The Pathuriaghata Theatre.

The Pathuriaghata Theatre was started in 1865 by Maharaja Sir (then Babu) Jatindra Mohan Tagore at his palace in Pathuriaghata. It was not a spacious house, but a beautifully got up one. The scenes were singularly well-painted under the supervision of Girish Chandra Chatterjee, the famous oil painter of Postha at Pathuriaghata, specially the drop-scene, which was 'Cablaze with aloes and water-lilies and was entirely oriental,'*

Jatindramohan secured the magnificent orchestra of the Belgachhia Theatre and amongst others, the assistance of the well known actors of the time, the co-operation of even Keshav and Priyanath not being excepted. With this magnificent orchestra and the distinguished corps of the Belgachhia Theatre, Jatindramohan was equally successful in entertaining his numerous friends, European and Indian, for over 25 years and achieving a reputation as high as what had been attained

* *Calcutta Review*, 1873. Kishori Chand Mitter's reminiscences.

by its prototype, the Belgachhia. Indeed, it left a lasting mark in the annals of our drama.*

Jatindramohan had published a new edition of *Vidyasundar* in 1858, with vulgar portions purged off and additions made suiting the occasion. A second edition of this was made in 1865 and with this dramatic verse of his own, he opened the Theatre on the 6th January, 1866.

Before this, there was a performance of the Bengali translation of Kalidasa's *Malavikagni-Mitra* in 1859 in Ishan Babu's house under the direction of Babu (Sir) Sourindramohan Tagore but it was the first as well as the last drama represented there.† The *Stage* as Ardhendusekhar Mustafi says, "was the *Nautch-Hall* attached to the west portion of Sourindramohan's residence, the house belonging to the estate of Rajendranath Tagore, father-in-law of Ishan Babu."

Sourindramohan once appeared in the role of Kanchuki and Mahendra Mukherjee about whom we have reference in page 29, acted the part of Vidusaka.

It is said that on the night of performance, Sourindra Mohan, after being dressed, came

* *Gourdas Byasak's Reminiscences.*

† Jatindra Mohan Tagore's letter to Madhusudan in 1863, Kisori Chand Mitaa's article in *Calcutta Review*, 1873 "Modern drama," Ardhendu Sekhar Mustafi's reminiscences.

§ *Puratan Prasanga*, Mahendra Nath Mukherje's reminiscences second series, pp. 154-56.

running on the stage and drew attention of the Maharaja, who appeared as king, addressing the latter. "—Your Majesty, come to the harem at once. Chhota Rani (the younger queen) has fainted at the sight of a blue monkey (*nil bandar*)". The above at once excited a roar of laughter amongst the audience and removed Sourindramohan's nervousness, who was comparatively green on the stage. The translation was made by Pandit Ramnarain with the help of Sourindramohan.

But to return to *Vidyasundar*, when the stage was about to be constructed in the Maharaja's house, the stage in Ishan Babu's house was dismantled and several things of that were used in the present stage, the rest being done at the expense of the Maharaja.*

Vidyasundar, staged on 6th January 1866, was repeated nine or ten times in continuous succession and the cast was distributed as follows:

Raja Vir Sing	...	Radha Prasad Basak (Simla.)
Mantri	...	(Hari Mohan Karmakar) Jorasanko.
Ganga Bhat	...	Girish Chandra Chatterjee of Pathuriaghata — well known painter.
Sundar	...	Mahendra Nath Mukherjee (Darjipara.)
Dhumaketu, Kotal	...	Hari Charan Banerjee,

* *Ardhendu Sekuar Mustafi's Reminiscences.*

Vidya	... Madan Mohan Burman, afterwards in the National Theatre,)
Hiramalini	... Krishna Dhan Banerjee (Hu- ... galkuria.
Maids to the princess	... Sulochana, Sasthidhar Mukherjee (Khardah), Chapala Jadunath Ghose, Bimala (friend of Chapala), Narain Ch, Basak (Simla).
Pratihari	... Umanath Chatterjee.
Prahari	... Brajadurlabh Dutt (Aheree- tola).

The stage-rehearsal had been held on the 30th December, 1865, before the Raja of Rewa, who had come to Calcutta for an interview with Lord Lawrence, the Viceroy of India and was a guest to Jatindra Mohan in his Emerald Bower. None but the distinguished guest with his retinue and the members of the host's family were present on the occasion of the first performance. It is said that the Raja was so highly pleased with the play that when it was over, he caused two packages of Kashmere shawls and a bag of money to be brought and offered for distribution to the actors. But it was courteously explained by Jatindra Mohan that as amateurs they could not accept the presents, but were all the same thankful to the Raja for his kind offer. Such was the enthusiasm of the people for

* *Michael's Biography* Page 651, *The Prabñakar*, Jan, 3, 1866 also corroborates the presence of the Raja of Rewa,

Pathuriaghata palace plays. that three or four days before the performance, all the tickets issued as complimentary cards to the guests were exhausted.

Ardhendu Shekhar Mustafi, the great artist of the National Theatre of the subsequent time speaks of the rehearsals, thus :

“I used to go to the rehearsals, which were held almost every night. Babu Ghanashyam Bose of Garanhatta was the manager † and Keshav Chandra Ganguly of Gosainpara the master... Brajadurlabh's and Girish Babu's performance was considered to be very pleasing and faultless. Radhaparasad Babu was no inferior to them but all the same Brajadurlabh Babu was in my opinion the best of the lot. His superior talents were noticeable even in the insignificant part of a watcher. At the time of inflicting punishment on Malini, the speech and movements and the manner of dealing her with cuffs appeared to be very interesting.”

As to how *Vidyasundar* was appreciated by educated public will appear from the following review of the *Bengalee*, January, 13 1866, on reference to a performance on the 6th :

THE BENGALÉE THEATRE,—The performance on Saturday night at the residence of Baboo Jotendra Mohan Tagore who has got up a nice little theatre for the entertainment of his

† *Prabhakar* of Feb. 13 1866, calls him Honorary Secretary.

personal friends and acquaintances was, to say the least, a highly successful and creditable one. We heartily congratulate the Baboo, who is an excellent gentleman and a scholar, on this happy turn of his mind to infuse into the wealthier and higher classes of his countrymen a taste for rational amusement by introducing them to dramatic performances like the one which it was our lot the other evening to enjoy. We indeed spent a most pleasant evening, but apart from the pleasure which most sight-seeing and music-loving people not given to any serious reflections of things and objects beyond the momentary gratification which they afford are taken up with, we were, by a careful study of the scenes brought to view, the plot and language of the drama, and the power for acting displayed by the amateurs impressed strongly with a conviction that, by being fostered and encouraged, the taste for dramatic performance will result in benefits of a more permanent character than those with which they can at first sight be directly associated. It will create a demand for that higher order of dramatic literature which we have in our Sanskrit, but in which Bengalee the language spoken by nearly twenty-five millions of people, perfectly adapted to the requirements of science, and already possessing some fine specimens of genuine poetry and classical prose, is at present deficient, not that it is not capable of dramatic adaptation, but that the taste for it had not yet been allowed sufficiently to warm itself into a desire for it as vital to rational pleasures. The taste once

acquired, and we can vouch from the enthusiasm with which the *Vidya Sundar Natak* was received that night, that that language will soon be enriched with a dramatic literature which might claim rank with our best Sanskrit plays, Authors are not made from any choice of their own—the taste and spirit of the age make them. The law of demand and supply applies as much to material objects as intellectual wares. The demand once created never remains unsatisfied. These theatrical meetings are also social gatherings calculated to bring educated native together, and to unite even discordant natures by a common bond of sympathy...

“The impersonation of the characters was almost faultless. The part of Hira was well sustained. She was a pretty woman herself, past maturity, but upon whom age had not yet quite told so as to make her appear less charming. She was an agreeable talker, sly and coquettish but not innately corrupt or vicious. Indeed, no sooner she saw Sundar, she was herself smitten by his person and his address. But the warmer sentiment melted away as soon as she learnt that the person upon whom Sundar had set his heart was her own sweet mistress. She was too willing to forward his views but by fair and honorable means. The young lovers, however, were for the romance of secret love and they accordingly kept Hira carefully out of the way. She was thus innocent of all their intrigues and when she was brought to grief as one privy to the whole affair, she cursed

herself for having ever given shelter to such an adventurer.

The part of Vidya was capitally done. It was essentially feminine. Her love was of her a thing not apart, it was her whole existence. She was nothing if not lovely. Even in her grief, her eyes swollen with tears, when the sad news that Sundar had been caught and sentenced to die was broken to her, she sank under its weight without being boisterous in a manner that made her look more interesting and lovely than even when she was happy. The songs which poured fourth under an effort to relieve herself were truly pathetic, though we must say that they somewhat interfered with the effect produced by her capital acting.

The character of Sundar was rather inelegant and rough. Ganga Bhat and the Rajah's Mantri acquitted themselves so well that we had nothing left to wish for. The Rajah was equally a successful character. But the two chamber maids of Vidya were altogether deficient. There were nothing feminine about them. Their dress was ill chosen, which heightenned the slovenliness of their appearance.

The *Vidyasundar Natak* was followed by a very laughable farce, which added much to the entertainment of the evening. The whole burthen of the satire fell upon the devoted head of a stupid old Munsiff, who already declined in the vale of years, had the variety to offer himself to a neighbour's wife as a lady's man.

The scenes, both in the *Natak* and in the farce,* were well painted and some were admirably suited to the occasion. We noticed particularly the humble but elegant cottage of Hira, which perhaps was taken from some existing model. The Orchestra was excellent and shewed considerable improvement upon those we had heard before.

When we left we only wished that the female characters could be represented by women; for all the time we were painfully alive to the demoralizing tendency of boys and young men throwing themselves into the attitude, the getures, motions and even the voluptuousness of women. But as under existing circumstances of native society, it is not possible to have any but courtezans to join the Corps Dramatique, we must choose the lesser of the two evils."†

The performances and rehearsals of *Vidyasundar* created a taste for stage in the minds of the illustrious actor Ardhendu Sekhar, who committed to memory several passages and became afterwards one of the most prominent figures on the Bengali Stage‡ *Vidyasunder* was very popular and we have evidence of a performance at Agarpara on Dec 31, 1869.

The next farce *Bujhle Kina*, ("Do you understand"), first performed in December 15, 1866 was also a great success and elicited frequent

* The farce of "*Yeman Karma Teman Phal*," was supplemented with it.

† *The Bengalee*—13th January, 1866.

‡ "*The Bengalee*"—Dec, 22, 1866.

applause and loud roars of laughter from the audience.*

Malatimadhav, translated by Pandit Ram-narain Tarkaratna from Bhavabhūti's drama of the name, was performed in 1869†. In 1870, two farces *Ubhaya Sankata*, or *The horns of a dilemma* and *Chaksudana*, (opening of eyes) both from the pen of Jatindra Mohan gave sufficient mirth to the spectators. In the former, the evils of polygamy were described and the other roused the sense of a profligate young man.

The Patrika noticed the usefulness of these instructive pieces observing that one performance produces such good in society as one hundred speeches cannot do‡.

Indeed, the 'farces' depicted the manners and customs of the age. Although they attacked with merciless severity the imperfections and ludicrous infirmities of the modern age, they did not render the same, our objects of dislike, nor those excited disgust.

Of the artists, Mahendranath Mukherjee's Makaranda in *Malatimadhav* was excellent as

* Mahendranath Vidyanidhi says, "It was in 1867, 31st September." As it was staged several times, we cannot ascertain with accuracy when was it first staged. Here it is not very material too.

† *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 10th March, 1870.

‡ Kisor Chand Mitra, on, 'Hindu drama, *Calcutta Review*, 1873, Vol, 57.

his Vidusaka in *Malavikagnimitra*. His performance was so very amusing that on one occasion, Lord Northbrook, who now and then came to witness the performance called him to his presence. Mahendra Babu bowed down to him and addressed the Viceroy as "Sir", instead of "Your Excellency", or "My Lord", and for this he was afterwards reprimanded by the Maharaja brothers, but Mahendra Babu replied in his usual amusing manner, "otherwise, why should I be only a clerk in Gillander's House ?"*

To the disappointment of all, no piece was acted in 1871, but early in 1872, on the 13th January, the stage re-opened with *Rukminiharan* followed by the farce *Ubhaysankata*.

In *Pathuriaghata* Theatre, not only the acting was excellent but considerable improvement in Orchestra was also made and thus the *Hindu Patriot* of January 15, 1872 notices—

"For an example of the cultivation of rational amusement of the drama and music, among the educated natives of Bengal, we point with pride to the—*Pathuriaghata* Theatre",

Rukminiharan was performed about a dozen of times, but the theatre was afterwards closed in condolence to the heavy calamity caused by the death of Lord Mayo, the Viceroy of India

* Mahendra Babu's reminiscences in *Puratun Prasanga*.

on Feb, 8, 1872 (vide Natinal Paper Feb, 21, 1872).

About a year after, the theatre re-opened and on the 20th Feb. 1873, Lord Northbrooke graced the theatre with the Hon'ble Miss.Baring, the marquis of Stafford, the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, several members of the Executive and Legislative Councils. and Secretaries to Government to witness the performances of Rukminiharan and Ubhoysankat, when the actors were repeatedly cheered by the audience and His Excellency thanked them personally. (Hindu Patriot, March 1873).

Rasaviskar-vriandak was a later production in 1881. Coming from the pen of Raja Sourindra Mohan Tagore, it represented the nine Rasas (emotions) of Kāvya (poetry), Hāsyā (laughter), Vilāpa (lamentation) etc., as described in *Natyasastra*. The incidents were taken from the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* e. g. Karunarasa was represented by Laksman's leaving Sitā in the forests and Sitā's lamentation, Hāsyā by Kālanemi's Lankābhāga, Bhaya Rasa (terrific) by the presence of Nrisimha etc,

It was composed for exhibiting at the Emerald Bower on the occasion of the College Reunion, held on 4th February, 1881, but the hall, where the stage was built, was too insufficient for the large audience that assembled there and the performance had to be stopped. Then the performance was enacted at the stage

of the Pathuriaghata Palace on the 12th February, 1881.

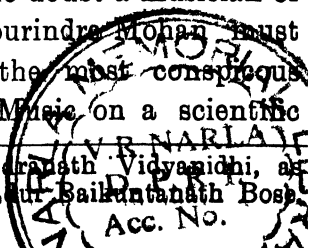
Some time after, when their Excellencies visited the palace on invitation, some scenes were shown to them for their entertainment—* and the scene “Vangavālākartrik Briteniya Ārati” was also shown when the subjects of Her Majesty—the Chinese, Mags, Mussalmans, Hindus, Christians—were all gathered together.

Music at The Pathuriaghata Theatre.

Music is a principal feature of dramatic performance and Pathuriaghata did not lack superiority in point of this.

We have seen that the Orchestra of Belgachhia, introduced at the suggestion of Jatindra mohan, was the first concert in a Bengali Theatre and was a thing of great attraction. After the closing of that Theatre, not only was this secured for Pathuriaghata, but supplemented further by the recent innovations of his brother Sourindra Mohan, and assisted by the co-operation of the famous musician, Kshetrmohan Gosain, author of *Sangitasar* and *Svarlipi*, it was a thing of great mirth and masterly art. Gosain was no doubt a musician of superior order, but Raja Sourindra Mohan must be credited with being the most conspicuous figure who revived Hindu Music on a scientific

* The statement of Mahendranath Vidyanidhi, as corrected by Rai Bahadur Baikuntanath Bose



basis and there was none second to him, both in vocal and instrumental music. He was recognized for his musical talents throughout the world and the Universities of Oxford and Philadelphia conferred titles of Doctor of Music on him. He started a school *Bengal Academy of Music*, in 1881 and the books of Kshetramohan and Kali Prasanna Banerjee also contained notations introduced by him. Hindu Music, thus revived by the Rajah, thoroughly demonstrated its superiority over European music and was made an accompaniment of the performance of *Malatimadhava*, where the present notation of Hindu Music was for the first time introduced.*

Closely connected, as it is, with our subject, the description of Hindu instrumental music given by Babu Kisorī Chand Mitra in the last pages of *Hindu Drama* † as to the ancientness of I. Stringed instruments (Viṇā, Seter, Tāmpurā), II Pulsatile Instruments (Dholoka, Khol, Dhole, Nāgarā, Bāyā, Tabalā), III Percussion Instruments (Mandirā, Kartāl, Kansi, Nupur) and IV Wind instruments (Mohan Bānsi, Śankha) ought to interest our readers,

On the 25th February, 1873, when Lord Northbrooke visited the theatre, he also saw *Ubhayasankata* with several members and was

* Vide :—also *The Hindn Patriot*, Jan, 15, 1872.

† *Modern Hindu Drama, Cal, Review*, 1873,

greatly pleased with the Orchestra and on the closing of the drama examined the different instruments and expressed himself highly delighted with what he saw and heard. In fact, he carried away a very good opinion of Indian music.*

Raja Sourindra Mohan Tagore had prepared an English translation of the airs played by the Orchestra, which was put in the hands of the European guests to help them in understanding the music.

That Lord and Lady Ripon also showed much interest in the Pathuriaghata Orchestra, we get from the reminiscences of Babu Gourdas Bysak and the note attached to it by Michael's biographer Jogindranath†

"Special interest for the Belgachhia concert was evinced by Her Excellency the Lady Ripon. She used to scrutinize every instrument and the manner in which each was played upon. She, more than once, visited the Pathuriaghata. It was at her special request that the Maharaja deputed Belgachhia Orchestra Company, to entertain their Royal Highnesses, the Duke and Duchess of Connaught, who greatly appreciated the music. The Duke remarked that some of airs were particularly delightful."

Thus with the national sentiments, enterprise, public spirit and enlightened

* *Vide Hindu Patriot* March, 1873.

† *Parisista*, page 651, third edition.

liberality * of Maharaja Sir Jatindra Mohan Tagore and the artistic superiority of his worthy brother Sourindra Mohan, the Pathuriaghata Theatre rose to the rank of a National Institution in Bengal.† It achieved a success, which considering the paucity of dramatic talent, was simply wondered at.

II. THE JORASANKO THEATRE

The contributions of the Jorasanko Thakurbari are also no less remarkable to the development of the Bengali stage. No doubt, the theatre started by the nephews and sons of Maharshi Devendra Nath was short-lived but their *endeavours to resuscitate our Hindu Drama* should be remembered with gratitude. The Tagore family is one of geniuses of Bengal and it has continually kept up histrionic art in full vigour for more than a century. We have seen the Prince Dwarkanath having patronised the Chowringhee theatre that would have closed its doors permanently but for his large-hearted contribution. In the building fund of the Sansoduci also he headed the list of donors.‡

Dwarkanath's son Babu Girindra Nath wrote a drama *Vavuvilasi* which was acted in

* *A. B. Patrika*, March 10, 1870,—“no money was spared for scenes and dress.”

† *Hindu Patriot*, Jan. 15, 1872

‡ Pages 256, 269, 277, *Indian Stage*, Vol. I, by the present author.

the Tagore House, with a companion of his—Babu Dinanath Ghosal in the role of Babu. [Bharati 1319—reminiscences of Satyendranath].

We have heard of another of his sons Nagendra Nath's attempt of starting Theatre.* Then again of the next generation, which we shall here describe. Next to that, too, we find that Jyotirindra Nath was not only a brilliant musician but also a dramatist of no mean order. *Purovikram*, *Asrumati* and *Sarojini* staged afterwards at the Great National Theatre and the Bengal Theatre were soul-strring national dramas of the time. Then again, Babu Abanaindra Nath is an artist of rare merit, and last though not the least, the world-renowned Poet Rabindra Nath has been occasionally seen on the stage till the other day besides producing his well-known dramas—*Raja O Rani*, *Visarjan*, *Acalayatan*, *Tapati*, *Chirakumarsabha*, *Chitrangada* etc.

The following geneological table may be of some interest to our readers :—

DWARKANATH			RADHANATH	
1	2	3	Srinath	
Devendranath	Girindranath	Nagendranath		
1. Dwijendra,				
2. Satyendra,	Ganen	Gunen	Daughter	Daghter
3. Hemendra,			m Jagadish	m Nilkamal
4. Birendra,			Ganguly	Mukherjee
5. Jyotirindra.	1. Gaganendra,			
6. Rabindra	2. Samarendra,			
	3. Abanindra			

* Says the *National Paper*, 11th. Dec. 1871 :—"The first project was by the late Hon'ble Prasanna Kumar Tagore. The next by Nabin Chandra Bose...The third attempt of the kind was made by the late Babu Nagendra Nath Tagore. He was very successful in his attempt..."

The Jorasanko Theatre was organised by the members of the Tagore family and the performers were also themselves and their friends. Pandit Mahendra Nath Vidyanidhi to the best help of the future historian collected the reminiscences of persons associated with this theatre and those who were present there. We shall narrate here the facts common to the reminiscences of Babu Nil Kamal Mukherjee, Akshay Kumar Mazumdar, Ardhendu Sekher Mustafi and Jyotirindra Nath Tagore. Nil Kamal was closely associated with this theatre and used to keep a diary and put into it incidents of this theatre and Akshay Kumar was the principal actor, being well known as *Comic* and was in charge of rehearsals.

The youngsters Jyotirindranath, Gunendranath and others at the beginning used to rehearse poems and select passages of dramas like *Krisnakumari*, *Eke-i-ki-vale Sabhyata* and *Bidhavavivaha Natak*, in the last of which Krishna Behari Sen acted in the role of Padma. These were confined only to the members of the family,* and considered by the elder members of the house as "Child's Play." On an occasion when a toy-stage was being built in one of the rooms, Ganendranath finding that it was done at the instance of his brother Gunendra, accosted him thus :

* *Reminiscences of Jyotirindranath Tagore.*

“What’s the good in spending money over a shadowy thing ? It you want a stage, do it in a proper way and after full deliberation.”

After this a committee was formed with Ganendranath, Nilkamal Mukherjee, Jaines Prakas Ganguly, Srinath Tagore and Devendranath’s eldest son Dwijendranath. As however no suitable drama was available, the projectors advertised in the *Indian Daily News* of 22nd January, 1865, for well-written drams depicting the evils of poligamy and announced a prize of Rs. 200.

Ramnarain responded to the call and obtained the prize by writing his *Navanatak*, which was approved by Pandit Iswar Chandra Vidya-sagar and Babu Raj Krishna Banerjee.*

The drama was then put on boards and was staged on 5th January, 1867 and repeated eight times and the last having on the 23rd Feb. 1867. The stage was built in the big hall in the first floor and scenes were regularly painted.

The characters were represented by elderly people† and the cast was as follows :

* Other dramas were also advertised for, on 15th Feb. 1865, *Indian Daily News*, as :

I. *The Hindu Females*—their condition and helplessness. Prize Rs. 200/- Time 1st Feb.

II. *The Village Zeminders*—Period 1st Feb. 1866. Prize Rs. 100/- Time 1st Feb.

The dramas art to be written in bengali and have to be dedicated to the Jorasanko Theatre.

† Jyotirindranath’s *Reminiscences*.

MALES

Gaves Bavu (village Zeminder)	Akshay Kumer Mazumdar.
Sudhir	... Sarada Prasad Mukherjee.
Vidharmavagisa	... Ananda Chandra Bhattacharjee
Cittatos (flatterer)	Jadunath Mukherjee, (Maharshi's son-in-law).
Neighbour (of the village)	... Sailendra Nath Tagore.
Neighbour (of the town)	... Nil Kamal Mukherjee. (Girindrs Nath's son-in law.)
Dambhacharya (Dalapati)	... Bhuvan Mohan Chatterjee.
Kautuk (Bachelor neighbour)	Matilal Chakravarty.
Subodh (Gaves Babu's eldest son)	Benode Lal Ganguly. (Amritalal's elder brother-in-law).
Madho (servant)	... Sailendranath Tagore.

FEMALES

Savitri (1st wife of Gaves)	... Sarada Prasad Ganguly, (Jyotirindranaath's brother-in-law).
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Amala (Neighbour)	...	Thaka Bhusan Ganguly.
Kamala	„	... Dinanath Ganguly.
Vimala	„	... Radhabinode Chatterjee.
Chapala	„	... Hem Chandra Banerjee.
Nata	„	... Nil Kamal Mukherjee.
Nati	„	... Jyotirindranath Tagore.

The characters were mostly the members of the family.

Kisorichand Mitra writes of the Jorasanko Theatre :

“Akshay Babu acted in the role of the husband Gaves and the misery of the domestic life was vividly realized. In truth, the acting* was infinitely better than the writing of the play. Not only Gaves Babu but almost all the other actors acquitted themselves most creditably. It is a thousand pities that the untimely demise of Babu Ganendra Nath Tagore proved a death-blow to the Jorasanko Theatre.”

Gourdas Babu also says :

“The representations which they gave from time to time in their house and in which they

* So says Jyotirindranath—Yakhan Gaves Vavur chhota ginni o vada ginni Gaves vavur ek ekta pa dakdal kariya tail mardan karivar janya tanatani karita, ar valita eta amar pa, tui amar patay kena tail makhchis, ityadi, takhan Gaves vavur avastha o mukhabhangi dekhiya dars-akera keval hasiya gadagadi ditei vaki rakhita. Indeed, Akshay Kumar was a jestor of on less distinction than Babu Keshav Chandra Ganguly. Babu Ardhendu Sekhar afterwards known as the master of all jests got much inspiration from Mazumdar.

took the part of actors could not be surpassed in respect of the excellence of acting, the exquisiteness of music and the sweetness of the songs."

"There was a magnificent concert party with amateur and paid musicians, Bishnu Charan Chatterjee, the celebrated singer of the Brahma Samaj, leading the tune and Jyotirindra Nath playing on the Harmonium. The concert was excellent. It had no borrowed airs and was quite in keeping with national taste."*

Everybody was glad at this time to notice the return of old days of friendship and union amongst Europeans and Indians. There was at that time a good number of social gatherings, where both the classes mixed very freely and cordially, the latest one of that period was held at the house of Babu Ganendra Nath Tagore on the occasion of the performance of the *Navanatak*. Many respectable European and Indian gentlemen were present. Babu Jnanendra Mohan Tagore Barister-at-Law, son of late Prasanna Kumar Tagore entertained the whole party with lively conversation.

* *The National Paper*. Jan 9, 1867-About acting also, the Paper says :

"Beginning with the graceful bow of the Nati, the representation of every succeeding character elicited loud shouts of applause from all sides, and rendered the whole scene an object of peculiar amusement to the audience".

Somprakas, Jn. 28, 1867 also wrote in a highly eulogistic way about acting: "Not to speak of Gabes and Chitttotosh, Kautuk Rasamoyi, Nagar (of the city) and Gramya of the village did also admirably. Sudhir was good, except in the last scene but Sabitri bad both in the make-up and representation."

Navanatak was followed by *Manomayi* and *Aleek Babu*, but that the Jorasanko Natya Samāj was short-lived and came to close in 1867, is also mentioned in the preface of a drama *Hindu Mahila Natak*, whose author Babu Bepin Mohan Sen Gupta of Shamra got a prize of Rs. 200 in 1868 in response to the advertisement for the best drama on *Hindu Females*.

We close this chapter with a few words as to how the Tagores showed great honour to a dramatist for writing a Bengali drama. Jyotirindra Nath said :

"A very important function celebrated the prize-giving ceremony. It was a memorable day. All the elite of the town was present and the amount of Rs. 500 was put in heaps in a silver plate. The drama was read, met with universal applause and the money was paid to Ramnarain by the president of the meeting, the late Babu Peari Chand Mitter, author of *Alaler Gharer Dulal*"

† *The National Paper*. Feb, 6, 1867.

Such patronage and appreciation was worthy of the Jorasanko Tagore House, which is still very famous for art, poetry and culture.

VALMIKIPRATIBHA

Though of a later date, we cannot but mention an important drama from the pen of Rabindra Nath. It was the well known piece *Valmiki Pratibha* by Rabindra Nath and we cannot do greater justice to it than quote from the reminiscences of late Babu Amritlal Bose :

"The short, sweet piece was performed at the Jorasanko House in 1880, before a congregation of literary celebrities. Rabi Babu, was in his teens, when he wrote this play. Babus Akshay Kumar Sarkar and Indra Nath Banerjee returned from Jorasanko to the National Theatre at Beadon Street, when my farce *Tilatarpan*, was being first staged and gave us a brilliant account of the play, predicting a great future for the boy-poet and composer of Songs."

The date of the first performance was, however, on the 26th February 1881.

III THE SHOBHA BAZAR PRIVATE THEATRICAL SOCIETY

In 1864, an association for dramatic performances was formed with Babu Chandra Kali

Ghose as president, Umesh Chandra Mitra as Secretary and members of the Raj family as members, and under the auspices of this, *Is this Civilisation (Eke-i-ki-vale Sabhyata)* was staged on the 4th, 18th and 29th July 1865, in the house of Raja Devi Krishna Deb at 1/5, 2/6 Raja Nava Kissen Street, North Calcutta.

The performance, as the *Hindu Patriot* remarked, was exceedingly creditable to the young amateurs : scenes were appropriate and well done : music, though not keeping with high merits of acting, was not inferior, dancing varied and spirited and indeed one of the principal attractions of the performance, but the paper objected to the representation of this farce on the stage of a family theatre.*

The characters, all of which sustained their parts admirably and equally well, were cast as follows :

Kali Vavu	...	Kumar Upendra Krishna Dev.
Nava Vavu	...	Mani Mohan Sarkar.

* Although the farce is undoubtedly one of the happiest productions of the fertile brain of the gifted poet and is a life-like picture of Young Bengal, full of sallies of wit and humour and written in graceful and familiar Bengali, but the poet has necessarily depicted habits and practices, which are equally shocking to good taste and morals,

Cooly and Kamala ...	Kumar Uday Krishna,
Karta, Durmukh and	
Mantri ...	Peari Baishnav.
Gardener ...	Preo Madhav Bose Mullik.
Harakamini ...	Kumar Brajendra Krishna.
Prasannamayi ...	Kumer Amarendra Krishna.
Nrityakali and Vavu...	Gopal Chandra Rakshit

From an account of Prabhakar of Aug 3, 1865 we find that Nava Babu, Hara Kamini and the two courtesans did admirably and that Babus Digambar Mitra, Kali Prasanna Sinha, Jatindra Mohan Tagore and many others were present.

Eke-i-ki vale Sabhyata was also staged at Sherpur, Mymensing, and other places.

Krisnakumari Natak was next taken up and staged in the *same year*. Babu Mahendra Nath Vidyanidhi is definite on the point, although we have no newspaper report in corroboration. Very likely, it was confined to a select few and was not a public one. The theatre was then abruptly closed.

It is also worthy of note that Maharaja Jatindra, Mohan Tagore was arranging rehearsals of *Krisnakumari* in his palace, but his revered mother not consenting to a tragedy being acted in the house, the idea was given up there.

Eighteen months after, *Krisnakumari* was again acted under the direction of a new committee with Babu Kali Prasanna Singh as the President, Rajendra Nath Banerjee vice-Presi-

dent and Babu Barada Kanta Mitra, a son-in-law of the Raj family as Secretary and Pyari Mohan Sarkar, a writer on 'operas' and members of the Raj family as members of the Executive Committee.

The first public performance after the Theatre was revived, was held on February 8, 1867. The *Hindu Patriot* (11th February 1867) gives a description of this in very flattering terms:

THE SOBHABAZAR THEATRE.

Krisnakumari is the best and indeed the only original drama in the Bengali language. Familiar with the richest treasures of the literature of Europe and India, our author has enriched his mother tongue with a production, which would have comparison with the first class dramas of modern classics.

The scenes of *Krisnakumari* are laid in that region of Indian Chivalry, which has been the theme of many a song and tale, we mean the Rajputana States..... The reader must have seen that it requires no mean histrionic talent to reproduce the thrilling events on the stage with immense effect. We must, therefore, make every allowance for the shortcomings of the amateurs of the Sobhabazar Theatre, who without the advantage of an experienced director certainly did as much as could be fairly expected from them.

The first three acts lacked life and animation but as the plot thickened and the interest of

the audience increased, the actors rose to the level of cries. The death scene was very affecting. It drew tears from many eyes. All the characters in the 1st Act were more or less equal to the occasion and the general effect was one of decided success. There are some very promising amateurs in this corps such as the young men who personated the characters of Dhanadas, Madanika, Bhim Singh, Balendra and Satya Das and if they persevere, we have no doubt, they will in time prove very succesful actors. The scenes were well painted and some of them were indeed exquisitely done. We particularly liked the garden scene. The rolling of the thunder was also well imitated.

As for the concert, great pains seemed to have been taken for it. The amateurs did not follow the beaten track of the Belgachhia and Pathuriaghata Theatres. Their tunes, too, we must confess, improved as the plot thickened. We wish that they would lay less stress on the Dholak which to our ear, gave too much of Akari character to the music.

Pandit Mahendra Nath Vidyanidhi not only collected facts from contemporaneous persons, but also quoted the above report of the *Hindu Patriot* verbatim. As such, with all sources to distinguish facts from fiction, his account possesses great value as to their authenticity.

The cast was as follows:

MALES

Bhim Singh, Rana of Udaypur Babu Bihari Lal
Chatterjee.

Balendra Singh (Raja's brother)	Preomadhav Bose Mullick of Hogalkuria.
Satya Das	... Kumar Ananda Krishna.
Jagat Singh (Jaypur)	... Upendra Krishna.
Narayan Missir (Jaypur Mahara- raj-mantri) and Doot	... Beni Madhab Ghosh.
Dhana Das courtier	... Mani Mohan Sarkar.
Sutradhar	... Kshetra Mohan ... Bose

FEMALES

Krisnakumari	... Kumar Brajen- dra Krishna.
Ahalya Bai (Raja's daughter)	Kumar Amarendra Kri- shna, son of Raja Narendra Krishna.
Tapasvini	... Uday Krishna Dutta.
Vilasavati (mistress to Maha- raja)	... Haralal Sen of Aheri- tola.
Madanika	... Jivan Krishna Dev.
Do. First attendant (Sahachari)	Hiralal Sen.
2nd	... Nakul Chandra Mukherjee.

Manimohan Sarkar was to have played the part of Madanika, but he took the part of Dhanadas as Babu Peari Mohan Das, to whom the selection fell before, could not appear and his part of Madanika was played by Babu Jivan Krisuna Dev. Thus was Jivān Babu termed

*Disbanded Madanika Kali Avatar.** He, on a later occasion, played the part of Kali in *Padmabati*.

After this we do not hear any more of this Theatre, but the example set by the above representations in Pathuriaghata, Jorasanko and Sobhabazar paved the way for the establishment of many public theatres in Bengal.

* *Rangabhumi*, 1307, 20th Magh,

* Babu Kali Prassna Singh was to have played the part of Bhim Sing but very much engrossed in private affairs, he could not do that.

Chapter VI

THE BENGALI THEATRE OF BOWBAZAR.

The Bowbazar Theatre started by some Bengali amateurs of the locality brings us specially into contact with a poet and dramatist Babu Monomohan Bose, whose genius as playwright and author of national songs needs no further mention. Babu Chuni Lal Bose, who had often, before this, appeared in the Belgachhia as Nati and in different female roles in the Pathuriaghata Theatre, organised the Theatre and Babu Baladev Dhara, who also appeared in the Pathuriaghata Theatre was his chief assistant. Monomohan Babu, who had hitherto distinguished himself as composer of *Kavi* and *Half Akdai* songs was approached by Chuni Babu for a dramatic piece and the former agreeing, the party set to work about the construction of a stage in Bowbazar, which was built in the courtyard of Babu Govinda Chandra Sarkar, 3, Govinda Sarkar's Lane, then known as Biswanath Matilal Lane. It was here that the first drama of Monomohan—*Ramabhisek Natak* (installation of Rama as a Crown Prince) was staged on a Saturday in the beginning of 1868 and the cast was as follows :

MALES

Dasaratha	...	Ambika Banerjee.
Rama	...	Uma Charan Ghose (of Raipur).
Laksmana	...	Baladev Dhara (an organiser).
Vasista	...	Hriday Banerjee
Sumantra	...	Pratap Chandra Banerjee) Secretary)
Vidusaka	...	Matilal Basu
Bandis	...	Bihari Das and Kanai De.
Rajaduta	...	Kali Halder,
Nata	...	Nanda Lal Dhar,

FEMALES

Kausalya	...	Chuni Lal Bose.
Sumitra	...	Chandra Mukherjee.
Sita	...	Ashutosh Chakraverty (of Sibpur).
Urmila	...	Bihari Dhar.
Manthara	...	Kshetra Mohan De.
Nati	...	Nanda Ghose.

A correspondent of the *National Paper*, who witnessed the performance says :

“The stage was beautiful, scenes were in accordance with requirements. Visitors were well received and actors were elegantly and suitably dressed and the whole performance was excellent. The part acted on, being very pathetic, was not agreeable to many, but the actors were not wanting in their skill, for almost all the gentlemen present were obliged to bring out their handkerchiefs to prevent tears spoiling their clothes.”

March 25, 1868. *National Paper*

The performance was successful and the drama henceforth became a popular piece for amateur parties. It was thus ironically termed as *Varnaparicaya Natak*. It was also staged particularly at Dacca, Tumlok and Gouhati.

Prominent among the respectable gentlemen, who frequently came to witness the performance*, were Maharaja Sir Nripenra Narayan Bhup Bahadur of Coochbihar, Raja Digambar Mitra, Mr. W. C. Banerjee afterwards the famous Barrister of the Calcutta High Court, Sir Chandra Madhav Ghose, the late officiating Chief Justice of Bengal, Poet Hemchandra Banerjee and some of the Judges of the High Court, both European and Indian.

The Englishman of March 17, 1874 speaks as to the presence of the Maharaja of Vizianagram, Raja Chandra Nath Roy of Natore, the Pakur Raja and several European and Indian gentlemen.

Monomohan's next successful drama *Sati Natak* was very admirably staged in the winter of 1872 and the dress and drapery to be worthy of the king Daksa had to be selected from the wardrobe of a rich inhabitant of Hatkhola, namely Dayal Chand Dutt, who was intimate with the Babus of Bowbazar. The cast was as follows :

* *Madhyastha*, Magh, 1280 on *Sati Natak* gives a review, but we refrain from giving it as the paper was edited by the dramatist himself,

† *Vide*, page 68 of this volume.

MALES

Daksa & Siva	...	Chuni Lal Bose
Santiram	...	Mati Lal Basu
Narada	...	Pratap Chandra Banerjee
Sabhapala	...	Nityananda Dhar
Nagarpala	...	Baldev Dhara
Nandi	...	Kanai Behari Dhar
Vaisnava	...	Beni Madhav De.
Saiva	...	Kshetra Mohan De
Nata	...	Nanda Lal Dhar

FEMALES

Prasuti	...	Abinash Chandra Ghose
Sati	...	Ashutosh Chakravarty
Asuini	...	Chandra Mukherjee
Alaka	...	Bihari Dhara
Magha	...	Kali Chatterjee
Sanaka	...	Nanda Ghose
Maya	...	Nanda Ghose
Bijaya	...	Kali Chatterjee
Nati	...	Nanda Ghose

We find, however, an account of the play in *Amritabazar Patrika*, 22nd January, Tuesday, 1874:

“Some respectable persons of Bowbazar have got a stage for amateur performances built at their cost. *Sati Nātak* was staged last Saturday. Parts were ably rendered by the artists. We have been much pleased with the performance. The sentences of Prasuti and Sati should better be curtailed. The Orchestra was very pleasing.”

The *Englishman* of March 17, 1874, also says

"The Bowbazar Amateur Theatre was well fitted on Saturday night, when *Sati Natak* was performed. The Maharaja of Vizianagram, Raja Chandra Nath Roy, The Pakur-Raj and several respectable European and native gentlemen were present. The acting on the whole was a success."

The party next staged Monomohan's *Harischandra* written in December, 1874.* which however, for the misfortunes to the organiser of the play Babu Chunilal Basu in the death of his wife and eldest son, could not be continued. The whole party became frightened and the Theatre had to be closed for good.

For the graphic description of the Bowbazar Theatre and the staging of the plays of Monomohan Bose, we are thankful to Mr. Sailendra Nath Mitra, M. A., Secretary, Post Graduate Studies, Calcutta University, and an erudite scholar, for the laborious collection of all facts relating to its performances. He is a resident of Sankaritola, Bowbazar, and as an ardent lover of drama and stage, collected facts from Babu Baladev Dhara and other persons of the locality. As few contemporaneous papers referred to the Bowbazar Theatre, the pains, which Mr. Mitra took, were arduous and enormous. Since his source was the living memory of persons associated with the Theatre, and not records in journals, the informations may, however, labour

* *Madhyastha*, Magh, 1281.

under very minor discrepancies, which on examination have, however, been found not to affect the interesting, important and vivid history he has given.

For example, *Ramabhiseka Natak* was staged first in February or March 1868† and not after Durgapuja i.e., September-October of the same year. Again according to his account *Sati Natak* was performed in winter of 1871 i.e., early part of 1872 (January), whereas the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* (30th Jan. 1873) speaks of a new play being then put under rehearsals. These, however, may not form a discrepancy at all, as the play might have commenced in the previous year and staged in 1872, with the help of manuscripts, before it was published, and might have been put in rehearsals a second time in the next year. The editor of *Madhyasta* 1873 Dec (Magh 1280) speaks of having witnessed the second performance and we do not know when the first was held. Newspaper comments (excepting advertisements of opening nights) are often misleading and a real scholar has to sift stuff from the kernel. Besides Mr. Mitra's authorities are definite that *Sati Natak* continued for 4 years and this seems to be the real fact.

Now as to performance, the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* of Jan. 22, 1874 writes

† *The National Paper*, Magh 25, 1868,

as follows—"All the parts were well rendered. we have been much delighted with the performance. Long speeches of Prasuti & Sati should better curtailed. Concert was pleasing."

About the performance of another play at Bowbazar, probably by another party, we get the following account:

Janaki-harana Natak by Kanai Lal Seal of Bowbazar. The performances were satisfactory, first in Kanai Babu's house, next in the house of Ramlal Matilal. *

For reference

Vide the Indian Athenæum (English), September, 1923, page, 74 and the Bengali *Vangavani* (monthly Journal, Magh, 1330, page 764). Both the articles were written by Mr. Sailen Mitra.

* *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 15th May, 1873.

Chapter VII

OPERA YATRAS AND DEGENERATED THEATRES.

In our previous Vol. I, we have dealt with Yātrā rather elaborately in pages 109-144. We have described *Krisna Yatra*, *Sakher Yatra*, *Puran Yatra* and *the New Yatras*. In our present volume, we shall describe how a new class of reformed Yātrās arose in Bengal and a correct description is found in *Vangadarsana* (1289, Fālgun, corresponding to 1883 Febry.) in the following way :

“Kayek vatsar haila, ār ek paddhatir yātrā
ārambha haiyāche. Ihāke keha keha
aperā vale, keha vā upahās kariyā
“oppeyerā” vale. Ihāte sāmlā āche,
pentlun āche, kot āche, chitkār āche, patan
āche, utthān āche, Ihāte dekhivār jinis
yathesta. Purve loke yātrā sunita, ekhan
loke yātrā dekhe. Tāhātei ei nutan yātrāte
vesbhusār eta jāk, Sangit o kāvyaraser
eta abhāv.”

Such yātrās are in vogue even today and we shall now describe here a few performances of this kind.

The first opera in Bengali is perhaps *Sakuntala* by Babu Annada Prasad Banerjee. It was written in a simple and elegant style and

songs were appropriate and exquisite. About its performance the *Hindu Patriot*, May 22, 1865, writes as follows :

“We had the pleasure of witnessing the performance more than once and we must say that it did credit to those, who were engaged in it. We hope the opera will supersede the degenerate yātrā.”

Ramnarain's *Ratnavali*, Kali Prasanna Sinha's *Savitri-Satyavan*, Madhusudan's *Padmavati* and other dramas, we mentioned before, were sometimes acted as operas, as only a few days ago *Pandavagourav*, *Jana*, *Sati natak* were so performed.

In 1865 *Padmavati* was very well acted as an opera in the house of Babu Rajendra Chandra Dutt (Raja Babu), the well known Homeopath of Wellington Square before a distinguished audience and the *Hindu Patriot*, Nov. 20, 1865, writes about it :

“The opera was preceded by a play on the pianoforte by the trained but gentle hands of Mrs. Berigny. At about one in the morning commenced the opera. The concert, which inaugurated the performance, was excellent ; in fact, it reminded us of the Belgachhia Orchestra. Then began the play. The actors acquitted themselves on the whole successfully and creditably. This we can say boldly and sincerely that, of the three dramas, which have been popularised in the form of opera, the perform-

ance of *Padmavati* was decidedly the best and the most successful."

We hear of another opera *Janaki-bilap* but we have not seen any copy.

These Yātrās, an admixture of theatre and Yātrās, were also degenerated into farcial shows and the *necessity of having decent theatres on popular basis was keenly felt* by the more cultured people.

On the other hand, the example, set by 1. Belgachhia. 2. Pathuriaghata, 3. Jorasanko, 4. Sobhabazar Private Theatrical Company, 5. Bowbazar Theatre, paved the way for the origin of mushroom growth, as during the rainy season, of various theatrical associations in Calcutta and Moffusil, too numerous to mention. and we propose to describe only a few, having some historical interest.

6. *Panchanan Mitra's Theatre at Burtola*, Chitpore Road (Garunhata).

Through Panchanan Babu's exertions, Michael Madhusudan Dutt's *Padmavati* was staged in Sept. 1867, in the house of his father Jay Chand Mitra with great eclat. This is what Babu Kisori Chand Mitra says in his reminiscences* :

"It was produced on the Boards of the "Bengal Amateur Theatrical Society" at Burtola. No, 246, Chitpore Road on the 14th Sept, 1867.

**Calcutta Review* : Modern Theatre, 1873, p. 262

This performance was preceded by a *Yātrā Padmavati*, based on the play in the house of the Dutts of Wellington Square,”

The *Dramatis personæ* were :

Raja Indranila	...	Behari Lal Chatterjee (afterwards of the Bengal Theatre).
Mantri, Sarathi		
Kanchuki, Angira	...	Comic actor Girish Chandra Ghose (Nyadaru Girish), late of the Bengal Theatre.
Vidusaka	...	Mani Mohan Sarkar, author of <i>Usa Aniruddha</i> . Friends used to call Mani Babu as Lord.
Kali	...	Jivan Krishna Dev (of the Sobhabazar Raj family). Not J. K. Sen, as said by Viswakosh. cf. ‘Disbanded Madanika Kali Avatar.’ vide infra
Padmavati	...	Sib Chandra Chatterjee
Basumati	...	Haridas Das, late of Bengal Theatre.

It was in *Padmavati* that we find that Michael Madhusudan Dutt first used blank verse in the mouth of *Kali*. At the request of Panchanan Babu, Madhusudan helped and encouraged the actors also a great deal. This was the first performance of the drama on the stage although Padmavati was a favourite Jatra show for the last two years.

7. *Nala-Damayanti at Bagbazar.*

In 1868, *Nala-Damayanti* composed by Babu Kalidas Sanyal, was staged at Madanmohantala in Chitpore Road, through the efforts of Babu Gopal Chandra Chakravarty and Nyadaru Girish. Kalidas Babu, too, took a keen interest and his composition and rendering of the part met with much appreciation, so much so that he was successful in obtaining a post at the Burdwan Raj House under Rajah Mahatab Chand Roy.*

The cast was as follows :—

Nala	...	Gopal Chakravarty.
Vidusaka	...	Kalidas Sanyal.
Bhimasena	...	Gagan Chakravarty.
Kanchuki	...	Shyama Charan Chakravarty.
Risi	...	Nyadaru Girish
Damayanti	...	Ashu Chakravarty and Shib Chatterji. next by a Jugi boy.

Induprava, published in 1861, a drama by Girish Chandra Banerji of Chata Maheshtala, was staged here. *Vichitravahu* was played by Gopal Chakravarty,

8 *Sakuntala at Arpuli, Pataldanga.*

In 1866, *Mahasveta*, *Sakuntala* and *Buro Saliker Ghare Row* were also staged here.

They next staged Nimai Charan Seal's "Chandrabali" and "Era-i-avar Burra Log." *Somprakas* of May 11, 1868 writes as follows—

Bengali, July 7, 1866.

"At Thanthania Theatre at 222, Cornwallis Street at the house of Krishna Chandra Deb.

"Babu Nimai Charan Seal of Charakdanga (Chandar-nagore) wrote a piece "Erai Abar Burra Log" Are these really great ?

"Evils of drinking were graphically shown. Actors with gestures and make-up were good and lightening, thunder and clouds were beautifully shown. Master Kisto Kisore acted, wonderfully. Raja Babu is the principal actor. He appeared a number of times and each time the audience felt much delight at his entrance. Doctor Babu's performance appeared harsh. The concert was good but the *Dholak*, though the musician displayed skill, did not appear to be charming—."

9. *Sakuntala* at the house of Kali Krishna Paramanik of Kansaripara in 1867 and also at Kshetra Ghose's house at Sankaritola, Calcutta.

It is not clear whether this *Sakuntala* was by Nanda Kumar Rai or Pandit Ramnarain

10. *Sitar Vanavas* by Umes Chandra Mitra of Bhowanipore,—performance at the house of Nilmani Mitra.

A correspondent in *Bengali* writes :

"I welcome with extreme joy the first performance of a tragedy, entitled the *Exile of Sita* at Bhowanipore. On the whole, the performance was worthy of our best commendation," although there have been many dramatic performances in Calcutta within the last six months."

11. Mani Mohan Sarkar's *Usa & Aniruddha* by Chorebagan party, in 1867. (early part).

12. *Janaki-vilap* in 1868 as referred to by the *National Paper*, April 29, 1868.

The mofussil performances were also too many to mention but *Sakuntala* performance in Janai at Purna Chandra Mukherji's house in 1858, vide page 38 and *Is this Civilisation* of Madhusudan in Atul Mukherji's house and Bholanath's *Bhale re mor Vap* in another Mukherji's house at Janai deserve special mention.*

In course of time most of the amateur performances degenerated into party squabbles on account of unseemly quarrels and mutual, undignified jealousies. As an example, we may mention here of a private Theatre started at Kaylahata, Jorasanko, by Babu Hemendra Nath Mukherjee (second son-in-law of Maharshi Devendra Nath Tagore and grandson of Babu Shyamlal Tagore of Pathuriaghata), in his father's house.

The pavillion afforded an accommodation for 200 selected persons of very great position and

The following dramas are also worthy of mention;

1. *Hindu-Mahila Natak*—a drama on Hindu females, their condition, helplessness by Batuk Behari Bandyopadhyaya. Calcutta G. P. Ry. Company (1868) vol. 50, *Calcutta Review*.
2. *Vikrama Natak* (1864)—by Durga Charan Chattopadhyaya, an East Bengal Dramatist. vide *Narayana*, Magh, 1322, Nalini Bhattashali.

put on its boards a farce "*Kichu Kichu vuji*"—"Yes, I understand," as a rejoinder to the farce "*Vujhle ki-na*"—"Do you understand", that was played at the Raja's house at Pathuriaghata.* This trash piece was from the pen of Bholanath Mukherjee and the other one (*Vujhle Kina*) was the work of Preomadhav Bose, well-known composer of Kavi Songs. This farce *kichu Kichu vuji*, which was played at Kaylahata† on 2nd Nov. 1867, (cf. *Vujhle kina*, performed in Dec, 1866) exhibited a too low and vulgar taste. It not only caricatured the Pathuria-ghata Theatre but had personal references to Maharaja Dr. Sourindra Mohan Tagore, who now and then suffered from tooth-ache, and Babu Ardhendu Sekhar Mustafi in the role of Dantavakra, gave a graphic and humorous description of Dr. Tagore and his tooth-ache. Ardhendu Sekhar was the first cousin of the Tagore brothers, their mother being his father's sister, and enjoyed a pension along with his father from the Tagore Castle. His father asked him not to play the part but he refused. For caricaturing the Tagore publicly, Mustafi with whom the whole Tagore family were greatly offended, lost his pension and all the favours he

3. *Charmukh Chittihara*—by Harachandra Sil.

4. *Urvasi*—by a Bengali Lady, published in 1866' Price Re 1, from Derozio Company Press. Vide, Jogendra Nath Gupta's article in *Panchapuspa*.

* Vide page 109.

† Ratan Sarker's Garden Street, Jorasanko.

had hitherto enjoyed there. It is said, Hemendra Nath and Bholanath were present at some performance of *Usa* and *Aniruddha* at Chorebagan and planned to start a theatre, when Bholanath Mukherjee would write plays and Hemendra bear the cost of performance. Ardhendu appeared in the roles of Dantavakra, Chandanavilas and Moradali while Dharmadas Soor (subsequently the famous stage-manager) appeared in the role of Chandanvilasi. The other characters were Natas, Khadyotesvar, Guruji, Kalu, Venod, Varada and Vaisnavi. The performance was so charming but vulgar that Madhusudan, who was present together with Babus Gourdas Bysak, Saratchandra Ghose (Bengal Theatre), Nabin Mukherjee (Jatindra Mohan's brother-in-law), is said to have expressed *mritikare vava mrttike*, which means—it has surpassed all, but may also mean that it, no doubt, gives mirth, but is worse than clay in point of vulgarity.

To come to our point, we shall mention here how the plays turned again into squabbles.

There is a song in *Vujhle ki-na* :

“O re nesate dhulu dhulu kare dunayan,
Ravan marila Rame kande Duryodhan.

To this Mukherjee composed the following song as a parody, to be sung in the same tune.

O re nesate dhulu dhulu kare dunayan,
Ravan marila Rame kande Duryodhan.

Na vujhe karechi nesa
 Kothay amar raila pesá
 Elokese ela Kesa karivare ran
 Damayanti-bhaye kencho
 Padire peyeche pencho
 Vidye ha'la garbhavati thakurer likhan,
 Siver ghare kestar meye
 Penchor mata raila cheye
 Sakuni dhakā Gangay neye karle palayan.
 Kheyechi asajhya mad,
 diyechi kar leje pad,
 Eto nahe kam vipad kamre na ekhan.
 Eki ha'la danter jvala
 Lokalaye visam jvala,
 Kanete karila kala vikata vadan.

This song, vulgar as it is, has a history behind it and the following passages will show that clearly :

1. Nesa, mada (wine) refers to excessive habits of drinking of actors on the stage.
2. Elokese—Keshav appearing as Jester, came bare-headed in Belgachhia, No. 1.
3. Damayanti—*Nala Damayanti*, No. 7.
4. Padire peyeche Pencho—*Padmavati* played at Panchanan Mitra's house, but now suspended—No. 6.
5. Vidya etc—to *Vidyasundar*, at Pathuriaghata. No. 2
6. Siver etc—*Krisnakumari Natak*, at Siva Krishna Dev's house. No 4

7, Sakunidhaka—*Sakuntala* played on the other side of the Ganges, is being staged at Howrah, Janai. Nos. 9, 12.

8. Danter jvala—refers to tooth-ache of Dr S. M- Tagore

The other song of Bholanath Mukherjee in the farce ran thus : *

Ami thiyetarer “history”,
Grin chasma nake diye go,
Dekhi grin rumer “mystery”,
Ranga ranga chheleguli sakhi saje sav,
Kare narir matan rav,
Tader akar dekhle akkel gurum,
Ichchhe hay a “kiss” kari.

Jay khudor vadite majhe ha’la ekta dhum,
Sune hayni rete ghum,

Elo rajar vadir vudo hanu Indraniler saj pari,
Dukankata vidusak se ladelī sarkar,

“Disbanded madanika kali avatar”

Paner khilir dokanete ha’la ekta “act”,

Valchi tari “fact”

Ha’la yugir meye Damayanti,

Eman thiyetare gad kari.

Green Room Mystery—about drinking parties.

Rajar vadir Hanu—Behari Lal Chatterjee, who took the part of Bhimsing at the Raja’s house, appeared as Indranila in *Padmavati*

* Bholanaths “Bhalare Mor Bap” a farce was staged on Feb. 1870 at the Aheeritolla house of the Mukherjees of Janai.

Dukankata, etc.—Mani Mohan Sarkar, who was called 'Lord', took the part of Vidusaka Dhanadasa at Raja's house, in *Krisnakumari*.

Disbanded—Jivan Krishna Dev took the part of Madanika—in *Kirsnakumari Natak* at Sobhabazar, which was to have been taken by Mani Mohan Sarkar—He also appeared as Kali in *Padmavati*.

Vide page 138.

Paner khilir—refers to *Nala-Damayanti* at Bagbazar. Here at first Shib Chandra Chatterjee used to play the part of Damayanti; next the son of a man of Yugi caste from Kombuliatola. Refers to 7.

To this Preomadhov Bose, author of Bujhle, Kina gave a rejoinder in the following way † which was sung in a farce acted a few months after in the house of Yadunath Chatterjee, Rajballav street, Bagbazar.

“Kaylahatar mayla hatay ha'la tomar thai”

In a third he showed the merit of a Kavi-walla but the song did not show good taste.

It ran thus :

Bhyala bhyala mor vap re,

Tui gorar dale kapni paris—

Apani kalir kapre.

Rajar vadir vujhle-ki-na

O tar vujhis kanchkala, o tor yay na gun
vala, Kichu kichu vujhi vale laglo tor
haf re.

Thus we find that theatre, though revived with great promise passed into a stage of degradation. We commenced this volume with excess of Kavi squabbles, but though theatres were thought to replace them, we again turn round to the same.

Theatres, on the other hand, which were really respectable, were, hitherto, generally organised by the educated and intelligent members of the wealthy Bengali community and the middle class had no access there. It was keenly felt that the public should not be deprived of the refined intellectual amusement and instructive entertainment, and a prospectus of a public Theatre was actually issued calling for shares and subscriptions.* Nothing, however, came out of this—and while Tagores and Devs tried all means to entertain their friends and patrons the common people on the other hand, began to be more and more disappointed, their desire for the amusement being unsatisfied.

It was about this time that there arose a mighty genius, who with his life-long devotion as a master artist, an inimitable teacher and a distinguished dramatist, founded, moulded and nurtured the Bengali Stage on national lines; and after years of devotion, industry and sacrifice turned it into an excellent institution for nation-building, which people of all classes have

* The Projectors were Radhamadhav Roy (also styled 'Manager') of 102-7 Aheeritola Street, Calcutta and Jogendranath Chatterjee.

Vide, Hindu Patriot, 11th Feb., 1860.

always earnestly sought for education, amusement and culture. By the time of his death in 1912 within 45 years, the Stage became a place, where people resorted to, not only for amusement and “art for art’s sake”, but like many other civilised countries, it acted as an instrument of culture and light and contributed not a little to the popular awakening of Bengal. This was no other person than the late Girish Chandra Ghosh who is justly known both as Shakespeare and Garrick of Bengal and the Father of the Bengali Stage.

Our next few pages of this volume will be devoted to describing the earliest chapter of his ‘making’ and how from the beginning of his appearance, the nation as a whole, accepted him as the first great master of the stage. The next chapters will deal with the National Theatre and Girish Chandar’s early connection with it, along with that of his talented colleagues and disciples, who assisted him in his noble work and mission as a builder of the nation.

Chapter VIII

THE NATIONAL THEATRE

SADHAVAR EKADASHI

On a certain occasion in 1867, when Girish Chandra Ghosh was only a young man of 22 or 23, he was approached by a person, who was congratulating himself on his obtaining a ticket for witnessing a theatrical performance in the house of a rich man and who narrated the devices, he had recourse to, for procuring the same. Girish had also reports how people, wishing to have entry into any of the houses, were often turned out by Darwans by the neck.

This touched the self-respect of Girish and when next he met his friends anxious to see performances, Girish promised that he would entertain the common people by opening a theatre within a year.

Shortly after, in the same year, Girish Chandra Ghosh then serving as a clerk in John Atkinson & Company organised for the first time a yatra performance of Michael Madhusudan Dutt's *Sarmistha*. To make it more attractive Girish proposed to insert a few songs in it and for that purpose, requested Babu Preamadhab Bose Mallick, who readily agreed to comply

with his request. In spite of repeated reminders, however, when Preo Babu failed to compose the same, Girish and his friend Babu Umesh Chandra Roy of East Bengal felt much disappointed and talked amongst themselves "what's the good of so much trouble, let us manage ourselves as we can." This first led Girish to compose some songs and we quote here a translation of a few lines as the first published composition of the great dramatist :

Ah ! what a beauty !

"Is it an illusion or a damsel in reality !

"Perhaps the sylvan goddess

"With her radiant face

"And lotus-like eyes with dew

"Roam in joy,

Who is this maid and

"Why she is helpless."

The successful performance of the yatra encouraged Girish to remove the much-felt want of the middle class men, who failed to secure seats in the aristocratic Theatres. He found a very able colleague in the person of Babu Nagendra Nath Banerjee of Ramkanta Bose Street, the maternal grand-father of Srijukta Anurupa Devi, the distinguished novelist of Bengal, and of another writer of great merit Babu Sourindra Mohon Mookherjee, Advocate. They were also joined by Babus Radhamadhav Kar, Arun Chandra Halder and Mahendranath

Banerjee of Paikpapa and with their co-operation and assistance organised the *Bagbazar Amateur Theatre*, in 1868, Babu Arun Halder lending the use of a room in his house for the rehearsals of *Sadhavar Ekadasi*, to be soon acted. As they could not afford gorgeous dress and scenes, the above named social sketch was selected for performance.

As we have already hinted before, Dinabandhu was the next powerful dramatist after Madhusudan* and both of them departed considerably from the beaten path of the older Sanskrit dramatists as followed by Pandit Ramnarain Tarkaratna. Like *Niladarpana* the rest of Dinabandhu's dramas are more or less of the realistic school and attempted to draw graphic pictures of the social and economic condition of the country of his time and *Sadhavar Ekadasi* gave a living picture of *Young Bengal*. It is after the model of *Ekei-ki Bale Sabhyata*, "Is this civilisation," of Madhusudan which preceded it. The late Babu Bhudev Mukherjee says that Dinabandhu imitated Madhusudan and by incorporating the character of Madhusudan in the drama as Neemchand Dinabandhu surpassed even his prototype in dramatic excellence.† The character of Neem-

* *Vide* page, 100.

† As a poet Dinabandhu was the link between his Guru Iswar Gupta and the master poet Madhusudan, but as a dramatist, he was greater.

chand is a unique creation representing a young man of high education and culture who took to drinking, which ultimately ate into the vitals of the society. He quotes Shakespeare, Byron and Milton and has a knowledge of men and things. Falling, however, intoxicated in the drain, Neemchand mutters :

“Hail holy light ! the offspring of Heaven first born of the eternal, co-eternal beam.”

Babu Akshaykumar Sarkar, † editor *Sadharani*, says—“these were the words often uttered by Michael himself”: ‘A Dutt is no body’s servant’—‘that is, moral courage and I am the son of that moral courage family’—thus Madhu used often to exult in.

Neemchand, being thus a living representation of so illustrious a poet, was a thing of great interest. The great Bankim Chandra, too, wrote about it :—“All the characters are living personations and the subject, too, breathes much of reality.”

But the late Rev. Lal Behari Dey, author of *Govinda Samanta of Bengal Peasant Life* in the *Friendly Review*, a weekly journal, edited by him made a very adverse comment of it. Thus he said:

“If this trash ever be put on the stage, we cannot recommend a better place for its

† *Pitaputra* by Akshay Sarkar, page. 531
Bangabhasar Lekhak.

performance than Sonagachee and a better audience than its inmates and their patrons." Dinabandhu, too, was not indifferent to this observation. He was highly offended and gave a fitting rejoinder in his next farce *Jamai Barik*, where Mr. De was ridiculed as *Totaram Bhat*, meaning one who commits things to memory as Totā (parrot), and produces those like a *Bhat* (thoughtless speaker).

The illustrious Bankim Chandra did not, how-ever, approve of Dinabandhu's caricaturing Rev. Lalbehari De as *Totaram Bhat*. In the preface to the works of Dinabandhu, Bankim said, "Totārām Bhat is a blot (kalanka) to Dinabandhu's fame,"

As we have seen before, Dinabandhu did not follow the dicta of Sanskrit dramatists and avoided a prologue and abundance of songs. But as the public had not yet been accustomed to the new ideals and loved to hear songs as in Yātrās, Girish inserted here as well some songs fitting in with the occasion and wrote a prologue with Sutradhar and Nati. The first performance was held during the Durgapuja festival of 1868 * (1275 B. s.) in the house of Babu Prankrishna Haldar of Mukherjee-parā, Baghbazar, and Girish appeared in the main role of Neem Chand. He was also the master

* Babu Dharmadas Soor stating that the first performance was held in 1869 made an error in time only.

and coached the other artists in different characters, which were as follows -

Atal	...	Babu Nagendra Nath Banerjee.
Kenaram	...	Ardhendu Sekhar Mustafi.
Jivan Chandra	...	Ishan Neogi.
Nakoor	...	Mahendra Nath Banerjee.
Ram manikya	...	Nilkamal Ganguli (of Dacca).
Kumudini	...	Amritalal Mukerjee (Bel Babu).
Soudamini	...	Mahendra Nath Das.
Kanchan	...	Radhamadhav Kar.
Nati	...	Nagendra Nath Paul*

The second performance was held at Shampukur in the house of Navin Chandra Dev (Girish's father-in-law and grand-father of Babu Chunilal Dev, actor) and the third at Garpar in the house of Babu Jagannath Bose.

The fourth performance was very important from historical point of view, as on this occasion the author came to see the performance and a host of well-known gentlemen came along with him. Chief amongst them were Bijoo Bahadur and other Rajkumars of the Sohabazar Raj

* There is some difference in the narration of the cast. Both Babus Abinash Chandra Ganguly and Kiran Chandra Dutt hold that Babu Radhamadhav Kar appeared in the role of Ram manikya and Nandalat Ghose as Kanchan on the first night. But Babu Radhamadhav Kar says that he appeared in the role of Kanchan and Nilkanta Ganguly as Rammanikya on the first night. *Vide, Radhamadhav's Reminiscences, Rangabhumi*

family, Dr. Durgadas Kar (father of the eminent Doctor R. G. Kar and Babu Radhamadhav Kar) Babu Sarada Charan Mitra (afterwards judge of the Calcutta High Court), Jadu nath Banerjee, the well known writer, and Babu Gopal Lal Mitra, Vice-Chairman (afterwards), Calcutta Corporation. It was held in February, 1870,* on the night of the Saraswati Puja in the house of Rai Ram Prasad Mitra Bahadur of Shampukur and the whole audience unanimously praised the part of Neemchand. In their midst sat the author, struck with amazement, when with wistful eyes and tears he saw the figures of his own imagination, so perfect as living beings on the stage and he came to the actors after the performance was over and embraced Girish paying compliments to him all the while, "I am sure, Neemchand has been written *for you alone*, but for you, the drama could not have been *acted at all*". So excellent was the representation of Neemchand that both Babu Indranath Banerjee and Babu Akshay Kumar Sarkar, two great literary luminaries of Bengal, used to express always that "Bengal's Girish was no inferior to Garrick of any country". Dina-

In *Bangadarsan*, Mr. Sarada Charan Mitra speaks of having seen the performance in February, 1870, the year he appeared at the M. A. Examination. Babu Amrita Lal Bose and Radhamadhab Kar made errors in stating that the fourth performance took place in 1869.

bandhu Babu's worthy son Babu Lalit Chandra Mitra, M.A. (now no more) wrote on the death of Girish in the *Bengalee*, echoing the sentiments of his father: "About forty-five years ago, Girish Chandra appeared in the inimitable role of Neemchand in Dinabandhu's *Sadhavar Ekadasi* and when he awoke next morning, he found himself an actor."

Nimchād-bhumikāy tumi sudhijan,
Nidrāsese yave tumi ha'le jāgarita,
Dekhile jayer dhvani kāpāye pavan,
Grihapath rangamancha kore mukharita.

Last though not the least, the late Mr. Justice Sarada Charan Mitter of the Calcutta High Court on a later occasion, wrote in *Vangadarsan* of Agrahayan, 1312 B. S., about this representation of Girish Chandra; "Many a drama in English, Bengali and Sanskrit have I read carefully. Yet some are only present in my memory and some have been effaced from it, and as age far advances, how much more will be lost in memory, but one thing I will never forget in life and that is the life-like acting of Neemchand of that night. That very night I was introduced by somebody to Girish. His youngest brother Atul Chandra was my class-mate and Girish has since been an esteemed and honourable friend of mine." Indeed, the ex-judge always held Girish Ghosh in the highest admiration since that perform-

ance. Sj. Amrita Lal Bose also said to us that when during that time he came to Calcutta from Benares, he heard the success of Neemchand's part from every mouth and especially from Ardhendusekhar.* The conversation ran thus :

Ardhendu—See the part of Neemchand, dear, it is worth-seeing.

Amritlal—Ah ! who other than myself can play the part of Neemchand.

Ardhendu—Oh ! dear, no, he is really a fine actor . Come once and see, hand Girish impersonates Neemchand wonderfully well.

(Amrita Bose's *Reminiscences*).

So also during the combined performance by the actors and actresses of Calcutta at the Kohinoor Theatre in 1912 to raise funds for raising a memorial of late Girish, a few months after his death, Amritlal's song alluded to Neemchand's part :

“Made matta pada tale
Nimedatta-Rangasthale,
Prothame dekhila Vanga
Nava Nataguru tār.

Natyamandir, 3rd year, 1319 B.S.

Thus was the position of Girish Chandra as the *Nataguru*, secured on the first night of his appearance in the immortal piece of *Sadhavar Ekadasi*, and his career as an actor began thence.

Ardhendu's autobiographical account also shows that, *vide*, 8th Pous, 1307—*Rangabhumi*.

Sadavar Ekadasi was also very important from the point of the establishment of the National Theatre, as this organisation grew so prominent within such a short time, that it was successful within three or four years to start the public Theatre. Natyacharya Amrita Lal Bose also acknowledges this with gratitude.

So important a part *Sadhavar Ekadasi* played in the starting of National Theatre that Girish never forgot to express his gratitude to the author of the piece. The eulogium, he paid in the prefāce to *Santi Ki Sasti*, while dedicating this immortal social tragedy forty years after, to the hallowed memory of Dinabandhu, will speak for itself. The letter runs thus :

“Sir,—You were born to be the founder of the Bengali Stage from which I have been earning my bread. For this you deserve my deepest gratitude. I have heard that respectful regards may visit even the highest region. So I believe that in whatever elevated sphere you may be or in whatever high mission may you now be engaged, my respectful greetings will touch your feet. When your *Sadhavar Ekadasi* was first acted, no theatrical performance could be held without the help of some rich men, as it was beyond the capacity of ordinary people to bear the expenses of dress and other things incidental to it. But such expenses had not to be incurred in your society sketch—the *Sadhavar Ekadasi*—and therefore the young

people, though of ordinary circumstances, selected this for performance. If your dramas were not there, *those young men would not have ventured to start the National Theatre*. This is why I respectfully greet you as the founder of the Bengali Stage.

For a very long time I had a desire to pay my grateful tribute to you, but I refrained from it because, hitherto, I could not write any drama worthy of acceptance. Now I find that my end is nigh. When will then my wish be fulfilled? This is why I have ventured to dedicate this unworthy piece to your sacred memory. I have emboldened myself with the thought that a god may be worshipped even with humble flowers, (Devatar pujā),”

Yours ever gratefully,

Girish Chandra Ghosh,

Baghbazar, 3rd Poush,

1315, B.S.

Here we ought to mark the change of events in the rise and growth of the National Theatre and of the Bengali Drama. But for Dinabandhu and his *Sadhavar Ekadasi*, the middle class youngmen could not have succeeded to make their project fruitful and but for Girish's powers as the organiser and his exquisite life-like representation of Neemchand, the type of young Bengal, the project would not have ultimately resulted in the establishment of

the National Theatre. If the dramas of Ram Narain and Madhusudau were originally meant for the rich people, Dinabandhu's dramas were most advantageously made use of by the poor (Dinas) and in *Sadhavar Ekadasi*, we find, as Babu Amritlal Bose rightly remarks, "the first germ of the Public Theatre in Bengal."* *Indeed Neemchand was as much synonymous with Girish as Sadhavar Ekadasi was with National Theatre and the Public Stage.*

Dinabandhu and Girish Chandra were, therefore, rightly called the real founders of the National Theatre and Public Stage of Bengal.

Sadhavar Ekadasi was also fortunate in securing the support of two note-worthy artists of great public importance. One of them was Babu Ardhendu Sekhar Mustafi and the other Babu Dharmadas Sur.

The story of Ardhendu's success as an actor in the role of Dantavakra, was listened to with joy by Girish Chandra, who asked his friend Nagendranath to have Ardhendu brought before him. Ardhendu was the son of Babu Syama Charan Mustafi of Baghbazar and Girish had seen him at a Morning School of the locality, as a companion of his youngest brother Atul Chandra Ghosh, afterwards an Advocate,

* *Manasi O Marmavani*. Sravan, 1923.

Calcutta High Court. He was given the part of Kenaram, which was rendered well. On the fourth night he appeared as Jivan Chandra in place of Ishan Neogi and so perfect was his representation that Dinabandhu himself praised Ardhendu immensely.

His kicking of Atal after rebuking him "Guetā, āj theke tokc tyāja putra kollem", was considered as an improvement on the author, who wanted to insert this in the next edition as an addition.

Satisfied though with the performance as a whole, Girish, however, marked the defects of the stage and its management at the first performance and from the following night Babu Dharmadas Sur, who had acted as *Chandanvilasi* as colleague of Ardhendu in the Kaylahata Theatre* and who remarked that the stage required improvements though the acting was good, began to work as the stage-manager and we shall presently see how wonderfully he contributed to the development of the stage with the new schemes of artistic management as *the architect of the stage* conveying fully the sense of the masterly dramas of Girish Chandra Ghosh. Indeed, the Bengali Stage could not have attained such perfection, but for the devotional endeavours of Dharmadas. It is said that sometimes disguised as a shifter of the

* *Vide*, page 142.

Lewis Theatre, he learnt the shifting arrangement of the scenes, but once detected in his disguise, was turned away. Thus he learnt the art, often submitting himself to various indignities. Of him Girish wrote :

“The actors, who won such high repute on stage, could not have acquired it but for Dharmadas. The renowned artists Ardhendu Sekhar, Matilal Sur, Mahendrta Lal Bose, Captain Bell, Sib Charan Chatterjee and others, if alive, would have exclaimed in one voice :—
“we have acquired reputation in public, but Dharmadas was often behind the wings ; a few only would have exclaimed “who drew this scene ?”

Natyamandir, Bhadra, 1317, B. S.

In the above performance, Kenārām was played by Abinash Chandra Banerjee of Chorebagan, who, for his excellent representation, was hereafter called as “Ghatirām Deputy” ; Radhamadhav Kar appears as Ram manikya and his Kanchan was played by Nandalal Ghosh, who was better known as Nanda Ostād. As it was a special night, the actors brought some scenes and wings from Sibpur and on the prosenium (Mukhapat) was written, “He holds the mirror upto nature,” * The fifth performance was held at the house of Babu Lokenath Bose of Bagbazar, sixth at

* *Rangbhumi*, 8th Paush, 1307.

Kidderpore, during the Puja of 1870 at the house of Babu Lakshminarayan Dutt of Chorebagan, grandfather of Babus Hirendranath Dutt Vedanta-ratna and Amarendranath Dutt actor, and in this performance another farce of Dinabandhu, *Biyepagla. Buda*, was performed with great success. The part of Ardhendu as Rajib Mukherjee, † an old Brahmin, mad for marriage, was a treat. The unique position of Ardhendu as a serio-comic actor was established here. He was here supported in the cast by Babu Radhamadhav Kar as Rata Napte, Babu Gopal Chandra Das as Panchar ma and Babu Sib Chandra Chatterjee as Kaner Bhagini, all of whom scored a great success in the representation of their successive parts. After the performance was over, Girish Babu in the role of Neemchand used to recite the following prologue before the audience, which, we reproduce here as the concluding mirth to the piece, for our readers :

Mātlami ta phuriye gelo

Dekhun budor ranga,

Bāsarghare topor pare

Kiva biyer dhanga.

Ay na Nose, Rata kotha japarista bal,

Ksama kariven dosh rasikamandal.

Asche evar chodar dal Bhuvno, Nose, Rata
Sabhyagan namaskar phuralo amar katha.

† This was written in reference to a living person.

The above verse means, intoxication is over, enjoy the fun, forgive us for our defects and accept our greetings.

The name of the book *Sadhavar Ekadasi* has been explained by Neemchand at the end of the book. Referring to Atal, another specimen of young Bengal, who, for wine and woman, cares none in the world and feels no shame to leave the most beautiful and accomplished wife, for Kanchan, a prostitute, and to men of this class, Neemchand, though a drunkard, otherwise a good soul, thus exclaims :

Mataler man tumi
Ganikar gati,
Sadhavar Ekādasi
tumi yar pati.

The verse can thus be rendered into English:

“Thou, the solace of the drunken
The refuge of harlots,
And widowhood to the woman
Whose husband thou art.”

Sadhabar Ekadashi not only laid the foundation of the National Theatre and made Girish famous, but it spread further the reputation of its author too. When Girish was planning to stage *Lilabati*, another work of Dinabandhu, Nabin Tapaswini a third piece by the same author was also staged by the students of the Krishnagore College at the College premises. Towards the expenses,

Dinabandhu who was then posted at the place contributed Rs. 200/-. Performance was good and even Babu Ramtanu Lahiri was present among the audience.

Education Gazette
July 29, 1870.

After *Sadhavar Ekadasi*, it took some time to have the next drama performed. There was no place to meet and the members were mostly occupied in Yatra shows.* Dengu fever also broke out in Calcutta for some time and at last Babu Brajendra Nath Dev, brother-in-law of Girish Chandra, with a view to get a permanent stage built at his house, raised a fund out of the contributions from brokers, beparies and clerks of Messrs Atkinson & Co, where he was the Book-keeper and Girish served as a clerk. Much enthusiasm was seen and *Krishnakumari Natak* was actually put under rehearsals. In a

* Early in 1870, *Bhalare mor vap*, a piece by Bholanath Mukherjee, was performed at the house of Jayram Bysak (Charakdanga), which was repeated at the Janai House of Ahceritola. Babus Nagendra Nath Banerjee and Radhamadhav Kar got a counter-piece written by Priyamadhav Bose. Although it was not acted, contests, however, continued for some time in *Samvad-Prabhakar* between the two writers. *Vide* Ardhendu Mustafi's *Autobiographical account*, in "Rangabhumi."

short time Brajendra Nath fell seriously ill and the actors were again scattered.

A common friend was next found and Babu Govinda Ganguly, a gentleman hailing from Ichhapur, Vikrampur and an officer of Digu Babu of Dacca at Hatkhola, agreed to lend the use of a room and bear the expenses of rehearsals. The party then thought of a permanent stage and began to collect subscriptions from the promoters and friends. A sum of Rs, 80/- was only collected, Dharmadas and Nagendra having contributed Rs. 20/-each. This magnificent sum again was exhausted in the purchase of a few pieces of cloth and colours for the scenes. The party was in despair again.

Girish then came to the rescue and with the permission of his ailing brother-in-law Brajendra Babu and other members of the family had the materials of the unfinished stage brought to the house of Babu Rajendra Chandra Pal (son of Brindavan Pal) of Brindaban Pal Lane Shambazar and placed those in charge of Dharmadas. As only a short while ago, the services of the painter had to be dispensed with for want of money, Dharmadas himself began to paint the scenes.

At this time a destitute English sailor without food and raiment, came for charity. In the

† Father of the actors Babus Chuni Lal Dev and Nikhilendr Krishna Dev, the former of whom was an important figure on the Bengali Stage.

course of a conversation Dharmadas came to learn that he was an expert in making painters' colours. Dharmadas gave him shelter in his house and in turn had all the scenes painted by him. He was so much occupied with the work of the stage that his duties as a teacher in the Kambalitola Preparatory School were performed now and again by Ardhendu Sekhar and sometimes by Babu Amritlal Bose, who had temporarily come from Benaras, where he was a Homœopathic Doctor. Thus with the help of Girish and the exertion of Dharmadas a *permanent stage* was soon built at Rajen Pal's house.

Both Ardhendu and Dharmadas were for charging prices for admission, but Girish opposing, with the suggestion that he would have nothing like it unless Rs, 5000/-was set up for the purpose, the idea was given up.

National Theatre* was the name given to this permanent structure. The name was suggested by Babu Navagopal Mitra, Editor, *The National Paper* who took a special interest in naming every organisation as national and was hence generally called as *National Navagopal*. He wanted to call it the *Calcutta National Theatre* but at the suggestion of Babu Matilal Sur, the word Calcutta was dropped and the Theatre was given its present name.

* *Vide*, Ardhendu Sekhar's *Reminiscences*, "Ranga bhumi", 6th Magh, 1307.

It took, however, some time and not until the summer season of 1871, that any performance could be shown in the National Theatre. The party had selected *Lilavati* for its performance, but its versification was rather too difficult for ordinary actors to recite the passages. It required a good deal of coaching ; so, the members got round Girish to guide them as their master.

About this time an amateur party at Chinsura, Hoogly (a few miles off from Calcutta) under the supervision of the great Bankim Chandra Chatterjee (whose name is a by-word in Bengal and whose *Bande Mataram* broke through the slumber of centuries) and his associate Babu Akshay Chandra Sarkar had the drama of *Lilavati* put under rehearsals with scenes and passages cut off and others added according to their choice. Girish's party was then rehearsing the whole play without omitting anything, as if in competition with Chinsurah party, but during the latter stage, Girish Chandra, owing to the pressure of office-work could not attend the rehearsals and the part of the hero Lalit was therefore given to Dharmadas. As the latter did not do justice to the part in rehearsals, the whole party, headed by Ardhendu, Govinda, Nagendra and Dharmadas, came to the house of Girish and entreated him in the most imploring terms :—"What ! we would be defeated by the Chinsurah party and you will silently witness

it by standing aloof". Ardhendu was the most eager of all to take Girish, as Dinabandhu expressed that without him they would not be able to do justice to it. Girish agreed at last and so superbly he did his part that the author clasped him in joy and exclaimed, "I was not aware that my verses could be so well read. Take this compliment at least". Ardhendu, too, did his part very successfully in the role of Haravilas and maid servant talking in Midnapore dialect. The following list will give an idea as to how the principal actors had their parts distributed :

Girish	... Lalit (Hero)
Ardhendu	... Haravilas and "Jhee"
Jogendra Nath Mitra	... Naderchand
Nagendra Nath Banerjee	... Hemchand
Mati Sur	... Mejho Khudo
Amritalal Mukherjee or Captain	
Bell or Bell Babu	... Saradasundari
Mahendralal Bose	... Bholanath
Suresh Chandra Mitra	... Lilabati
Sib Chandra Chatterjee	... Srinath
Kshettra Ganguly	... Rajlakshmi
Radhamadhav Kar	... Kshirode-basini
Hingul Khan	... Raghua Ude
Jadu Bhattacharjee	... Yogajivan

It was here that Babu Mahendra Lal Bose, afterwards the well-known tragedian, met Girish Chandra Ghosh. After the most successful career of 20 years when Mahendralal passed away in March 1901, (24th Falgun 1307 B.S.)

Girish Chandra thus wrote about him in "*Rangalaya*" :

"Mahendra Lal acquired a taste in acting in his younger days and when our amateur party showed performances of *Sadhavar Ekadasi*, he used to be present almost every night. After this, when *Litavati* was settled for performance, I met him first. He wanted a part in the play. But the cast was almost settled then. He was, however, allowed to appear in the short role of the village Zeminder Bholanath Chaudhury, and to conceal his tender youth he was made to put on a pair of false moustache. The whole party was glad to see the change in countenance. When, in the play Mahendra Lal in his role in conversation as a drunken man used to tell Srinath, his brother, "what she says is right, but brother, what can I do" (Scene III, Act IV), the expression will never be forgotten by those who heard him. Dinabandhu, the author, after the performance addressed him as "Bholanath Choudhury."

In later years, Mahendralal grew to be a very successful actor and was called the *Tragedian of Bengal*. In acting scenes of despair, he was without any parallel.

The performance of *Lilavati* received warm applause from the audience and pleased the author so much that he expressed thus 'Now shall I write to Bankim, 'duo' (fie), thou art to be defeated,' Dr. Kanai Lal De also so much

appreciated the play that he expressed before Maharaja Jatindra Mohan Tagore himself that "Your performance compared with that of Girish's party is but a crow nursed up in a golden cage."*

The yard was large and spacious and yet a number of audience had to go disappointed every night for want of accommodation. So great was the earnestness of the general public to see theatrical performances, that to avoid rush, Dharmadas, the manager, used to distribute tickets on reference to University certificates, which had to be shown him.

Girish too wrote—"the reputation of Lilabati spread so far, that persons in batches poured in as candidates for tickets." Thus, we find that Dinabandhu's *Lilavati* was staged by the National Theatre in June 1871, and was repeated four nights only, but owing to excessive rains, the stage was considerably damaged and the party was dissolved, not to meet till January, 1872.†, after which they recommenced rehearsals.

* *Vide*, Ardhendu Sekhar's *Biography* by Girish Chandra.

† In January 1872, we have evidence of the staging of *Sarmistha* at Coochbihar Rajbari Theatre, through the exertion of the Stamp Superintendent, who devoted whole time for the success of the play. It was during the time of the Political Agent Col. Haughton. *Vide*, *Hindu Patriot*, Jan 29. 1872 "The Drama of Cooch-bihar."

Some of our friends of the modern period have asserted that *Lilavati* was staged in May, 1872 and not on the previous year. The present writer wrote two articles in the issues of Aghrahayana and Magh of 1339 B.S. of the now-defunct monthly journal *Panchapuspa*, edited by Prof. Amulya Charan Vidyabhushan. The discussion was entirely academic and as this matter is not connected with any fact of importance, the history of the stage is not affected in the least whether the play was performed in 1871 or 1872. As, however, no erroneous notion should be entertained even of a minute detail, I weighed all facts most carefully and after a deliberate consideration, agree with the late Babu Ardhendu Sekher Mustafi,* that *Lilavati* was staged for the first time, by the National Theatre, still amateur, in 1871 (June), and others followed the party in 1872.

As theatres † were too many at the time, it is not prudent to identify one for the other without some common peculiarities and one wonders as to how a performance by Shambazar Natya

* Vide Ardhendu Sekhar's *Reminiscences*, *Rangabhumi*, Magh, 1307.

† Theatres and Operas are not a few in this city. If not now, at least some time ago, they were as thick as black-berries. Every street and every line could boast of one such institution. Nor are those theatres of ordinary merit. Some were of excellent character. *The National Paper*, 11th Dec., 1872.

Samaj of 1872,* could be identified as the first performance done on the previous year by Baghbazar Amateur Theatre (the previous name) or the National Theatre (the present name) or one by which Girish, Ardhendu, Nagendra, Mahendra and others could be identified.

On the other hand, Babu Ardhendu Sekhar Mustafi narrates the incidents of the period from 1871, July (date of *Lilavati*) to 1872, 7th Dec. (the admitted date of *Niladarpana*), covered in seventeen months, with so minute details and accuracy that we have no hesitation to hold his account as the most authentic and accurate. All the contemporaries, Babus Amritlal Bose, Radhamadhav Kar and Mahendra Lal Bose pay compliments for authenticity of his history and none contradicts him. Further discussion here would be too dreary and taxing to our readers.

Litavati spread the reputation of the National Theatre in various directions and Girish next selected *Niladarpana Natak* for performance by his party, as he remembered the

* *Litavati* was staged last Saturday by Shambazar Natya Samaj and there is contemplation of giving more shows. The company would have done if the performances were done some time earlier. The summer has assumed a dreary appearance and it will be very troublesome both for the actors as well as spectators—*Madhyastha*, May 23, 1872.

N.B. There is nothing to show this was a performance by Girish Ghosh's party.

sensation the drama produced in mufussil ten years ago, while he was still in his teens. Babu Bhuvan Mohan Neogi, so well known a figure in connection with the public stage of Bengal, came to the field at this time. He lent his garden house standing on* the Ganges, for rehearsals from January, 1872 and used to help the party with money from time to time. After the rehearsals had fairly advanced under Girish's guidance and coaching and all the scenes of *Niladarpana* painted by Dharmadas, Girish was pressed by his colleagues to open the stage as a public theatre by charging prices for admission. He, however, considered the idea too premature, as his ideal of "National" was great and something different. To charge prices in the name of the National Theatre with such a poor stage and scenes and a group of a few amateurs of a particular locality would only be slighting the hallowed name of the 'National' which applied to the Bengali Nation as a whole, and other peoples would have a very poor idea of the Bengalees if this little amateur stage were supposed to represent their National Ideal.

His main objection was that for our National Theatre" to charge prices from the Public would only be attracting public notice to criticise our defects and slight us.

* *Reminiscences of Ardhendu, Rangabhumii.*

† Vide Dharmadas Sur's reminiscences in *Natya Mandir* 1317 B. S.

Everybody, however, seemed to turn a deaf ear to his objections ; they decided almost unanimously, remarking, "If he differs, let us do without him and let us find out a man who can like him keep us all under control." Girish left the party owing to this difference and Babu Benimadhav Mitra, who happened to be at the ghat in connection with the Gangāyātrā of a dying man at the time, was made their president.* The dress rehearsal was held at the house of Babu Nagendra Nath Benerjee.

The house of Madhusudan Sanyal at Jorasanko (popularly known as the Ghariwalla Bari, 337, Upper Chitpur Road) was rented at Rs. 30, a month and the stage was soon built up there. Though practically there was no pavilion and the audience had to sit under the canopy of canvas, yet the play was a great success and the sale proceeds amounted to Rs. 700/- in the first night, the tickets having been priced at Rs. 2/- first class (chairs), Re.1/- second class (benches of planks) and As.-/8/- third class (raised

* Some persons still raise the false issue that the word 'National' was given, when the theatre was made public. The reminiscences of Ardhendu Sekhar the most forward for making the theatre public from the time of Lilabati are definite on the point. He declares that the theatre was 'National' when Lilabati was staged. 'Girish Gitabali' by Abinash Gangolee during Girish's life time also corroborates this. This 'National' came into prominence only when it became public.

pucca plinth).† The performance commenced at 8 p.m. (doors being opened at 7 p. m.).

The cast was distributed as follows :†

Nagendra Nath Banerjee	...	Nabin Madhav
His brother Kiran	...	Bindu Madhav
Ardhendu Sekhar Mustafi	...	Mr. Wood, Golok Bose Raiyat, Savitri.
Mati Lal Sur		Torap, Raicharan, Gopal Muktear.
Mohendra Bose	...	Magistrate, Sadhu Charan, Padi Mayrani
Amrita Lal Bose	...	Sairindhri
Abinash Chandra Kar	...	R. P. Rogue
Kshetra Ganguly	...	Saralata
Amrita Lal Mukherjee (Bell Babu)	...	Kshetramani
Sib Chandra Chatterjee	...	Gopi Dewan
Gopal Chandra Das	...	Nabin Madhav's Muktear
Tincowri Mukherjee	...	Rabati, Aduri
Shashi Bhushan Das	...	Amin, Pundit Maha- saya, Kaviraj
Purna Chandra Ghosh	...	Lathiwal
Jadunath Bhattacharjee	...	Rayyat
Golok Chatterjee	...	Khalasi
Kartik Chandra Paul	...	Dresser

Ardhendu, in the role of Mr. Wood, was a unique figure and the performance was very much appreciated, though the author keenly felt the gap of a serious actor in the absence of Girish Chandra. Properly speaking, this was the first public theatre, having opened on

† *Reminiscences* of Ardhendu Sekhar & Amritalal, Kiran Babu and Abinash Babu's account.

the 7th December, 1872 (on 23rd Agrahayan, 1279 B. S.), under the old name of *National Theatre*, with the performance of *Niladarpana*. In it the important figures were Ardhendu, Nagendra, Dharmadas, Mahendra, Bell Babu and Amritalal. The money, however, was spent for the benefit of the stage and improvement of dramatic literature and none used to take a share of it except Ardhendu who needed occasional help.† Practically, all the actors worked for the sake of a high ideal and the Bengali stage was really built on the sacrifice of a few Bengali youths of the middle class.

This was the first time that Babu Amritalal Bose took a part here. He was then practising as a Homeopathic Doctor, first at Benares and then at Patna, and after Girish Chandra left the party, the part of Sairindhri, which had been given to Babu Radhamadhav Kar, was played by him. The representation was excellent and his weeping impressed the audience. It is said, Ardhendhu taught him to weep at a deserted house in the evening, which since acquired notoriety as *Bhuter Bari* or the haunted house.

It will not be out of place to put before our readers the contemporary opinions regarding the performance.

* On the third night he had to be paid before he was persuaded to come and play his part.

of *Niladarpana*. The *National Paper* called it an event of national importance * and felt it an honour to record it in its columns. The Patrika considered it a great thing that without any support of any *rich man*, the theatre promised to be a national concern, which would ensure great benefit to the society and encourage talented writers to write plays.† The *Madhyastha* was gratified at the sight of the audience, both by their number and their outward appearance. Indeed, the number was so large that the authorities found it difficult to accommodate all with seats and a number of people was found going back, disappointed.‡

About the performance, *The Indian Mirror*§ rightly remarked that throughout the whole, the acting was most excellent and it did not know what to admire best—whether Sadhu Charan's ease of acting, Sairindhri's maiden modulation of voice or the gentle motion and the accents of the graceful Saralata and *The Mirror* considered that although Torap in some instances out-heroded the Herod, the part was, however, acquitted very creditably.

The National Paper, however, gave the palm of superiority to the following actors over the rest, amongst the male—first Torap,

* *The National Paper* 11th Dec., 1872.

† *The Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 12th Dec.' 1872,

‡ *Madhyastha*, 15th Paush, 1279, 28th Dec. 1872.

§ *Indian Mirror*, 26th Dec., 1872,

second Golok Bose, third Nabin Madhab, fourth Dewan, fifth rayyats, sixth the little boys and among the females, Golok Bose's wife, Sairindhri, Kshetramani, Padi Mayrani. It continued that the actings of the females were most pathetic, especially when Golok Bose's wife played the idiot's part, when Kshetramani grew righteously indignant at the shameful conduct of Rogo—the Shahib, and they all lamented over the miserable condition of Bose's family. Many amongst the audience shed copious tears, when they saw the enactment of parts.

Madhyastha considered, however, Golok Bose, Dewan of the Indigo Factory, Mr. Wood, Mr. Rogue, Amin, Muktear, Kaviraj, Torap and Kshetramani to be classed as the best, Nabin Madhav, Sadhu Charan, Pandit, Daroga, four boys, Sairindhri, Saralata, Padi Mayrani as second class artists and others, who approached those closely, to be third class actors. In fact each one vied with another in excellence to verify the slang *Look to me*. It also considered that the manner in which the Dewan of the Indigo Factory, Mr. Wood, Kaviraj, Torap, Kshetramani in all the scenes, Golok Bose in the Magistrate's Court, Savitri in her insanity, Kshetramani at the time when the Shahib was using force upon her, Revati at the time of Kshetramani's death, Torap and Nabin Madhav when they rescued Kshetramani from Mr. Rogue's hands, Sairin-

dhri when Nabin Madhav was lying unconscious, and Saralata in that scene and just before she was killed by her mother-in-law, were excellent and highly praise-worthy.

The Patrika also expressed gratification at the excellent representation by artists. In its opinion, "The loyal and spirited character of Torap was well represented. The roles of Golok Bose and his wife were played by one and the same actor. He is an expert actor. But he could not well represent the wife's part. Sairindhri was not so good, but her cries were indeed marvellous. Saralata was excellent. Each and every character delighted us. The performance was faultless."

Some of the artists have also left reminiscences, which are here worth mentioning. Babu Dharmadas Sur believed that such an excellent representation could not be surpassed in future. Babu Ardhendu Sekhar felt that with the high appreciation they received from the audience, their breasts were puffed up ten times in glee. Babu Amritlal Bose also in his personal reminiscences about his co-actors says, "Handsome Nagendranath did well as Nabin. The stalwart figure of Ardhendu most appropriately fitted in with the character of Mr. Wood. Abinash Babu had a very handsome appearance and his features looked rather rough and stern and he could thus splendidly represent the cruel and reckless officer of the Indigo Factory—Mr. Rogue. Last, but not the least, Matilal's acting

as Torap and his make-up were so excellent that none has yet been able to act that part successfully as Matilal."

Indeed, inspite of petty mismanagment, here and there, the acting, on the whole, was so excellent that even the famous educationist Babu Rajnarayan Bose of the Brahma Community after witnessing the performance remarked, "that the ideas he had formed in his mind about the dramatic characters, their pose, posture, speech and dress tallied with the reality."*

The authorities, however, had to meet one difficulty. Our readers must have read at page 98, how Rev. Mr. J. Long was sentenced to one month's imprisonment for libel, in 1861 and the Englishman† expressed surprise at Government's allowing the play to be represented without libellous parts being removed. Babu Nagendra Nath Banerjee, however, on the following day (21st Dec.) wrote in excuse that

* *Madhyastha*, 28th Dec., 1872.

† *The Englishman*, 20th Dec writes thus :

A native paper tells us that the play of *Nil Darpan* is shortly to be acted at the National Thetre in Jorasanko. Considering that the Rev. Mr. Long was sentenced to one month's imprisonment for translating the play, which was pronouced by the High-court a libel on Europeans, it seems strange that Government should allow its representation in Calcutta, unless it has gone through the hands of some competent censor and the libellous parts have been excised.

“the object of the promoters was simply to represent village life and it was far from their object to traduce the character of Europeans and that the libellous portions have been omitted and that many European gentlemen have already expressed their appreciation of the movement by being present on the occasion of the last performance at the National Theatre.”*

The Deputy Commissioner of Police was present on the 2nd night of the performance (21st) and inspite of his assurance that he came there only as a spectator, one of the promoters, however, appeared on the stage, at the close of the play and apologised—“We act this drama because the state of the village-life has been vividly described, but not from malice, nor for the disgrace of any community.”†

Nothing, however, was heard after this.

We ought to give also the other side of the shield here.

“Sulov” still complained of the company not having the good taste to exclude obscene scenes and expressions from the play.‡

In the articles “National Theatricals” and “Father” published in the *Indian Mirror* of the 19th and 27th December, respectively, and in other papers, appeared also adverse criticisms of the play. The former issue contained :—
“Histrionic arts” :

* *The Englishman*, 23rd Dec., 1872.

† *Madhyastha*, 28th Dec., 1872.

‡ *Mirror* 19th Dec, 1872

"The play failed to bring the atrocities of the Indigo Planters vividly before the eyes of the spectators. Golok and his wife were represented by the same actor, but though an adept, he was not so successful in the wife as in the husband, a comparatively very inferior part. Sairindhri the heroine was not upto the mark : her weeping tone was unnatural"*

The issue of the latter date also contained the opinion of "Father" in the following expressions :—

"Up goes the drop-scene next and out comes the rickety stage with its repulsive hangings. I was also touched at the tragic death of the author. Golok Base's limping exit and nasal voice was simply ridiculous. The much-injured ryot, too, vied with each other in comic preference. Sairindhri belonged to some extinct race of mortals, whose weeping tone some antiquary might recognise and it was curious sight to see her drawling with the upper lip curved and head beating time." †

Some actors of the day believed that the articles were written by or at the direction of Girish Chandra Ghosh. It might be that the leader of the *Sadhavar Ekadashi* party really represented the "Father of the Stage." Though there is no definite proof beyond mere suggestion to attribute the authorship to Girish, we

**Indian Mirror*, 19th December, 1872.

† *Indian Mirror* 27th Dec, 1872, vide *A. B. Patrika* 26th Feb, 1932 Present author's articles.

must at the same time admire the un-named critic whoever he was, for the anxiety the articles expressed to see the stage really purged off its evils so that real art might be shown from the very beginning and what he says has been mostly corroborated by journalists here or there. That Girish Babu satirised the party for taking so rash and premature a step by making the theatre public without a better house and a better stage may, however, be seen from the following song, which he put into the mouth of Babu Radhamadhav Kar, while playing a farce in a Yātra performance.

The song, satirical, as it is, represents a chapter of the history of the National Theatre and we give it below :—

Lupta Veni vachiche Terodhar
 Tāhe Purna, Ardha-Indu, Kiran,
 Sindur mākhâ matir hâr
 Naga hote dhārâ dhāiya Sareshati,
 Ksinakayâ,
 Vividha vighraha ghâter upar sobha pay
 Siva sambhusuta Mahendrâdi
 Yadupati avatar
 Alaksyete Visnu kare gan, kiva
 dharmaksetra sthan.
 Avinasi muni rsi kocche vose
 dhyân.
 Savai mile deke vale Dinabandhu
 kâra par
 Kiva Balumoy vela, pale pal reter bela !

Bhuvanmohan chare kare Gopále khelá
 Michhe kare āsá yata chásā niler
 goday dicche sâr.

Kalankita sasi sarase amṛta
 barase

Jnan hoi bā deener gaurav eta dine
 khāse

Sthanamahatmye hāndi shundi poisha
 de dekhe bahar.

The song is a satire on some actors of the play, whose names we give below in order of the rhyme.

The meaning may be explained thus :

Lupta Veni—Venimadhav Mitra, President,
 but whose name was not announced.

Purna—Purna Chandra Mitra, actor.

Ardha-Indu--Ardhendu, the leading actor

Kiran—Kiran Chandra Banerjee (Nagen Babu's brother).

Sindurmakha Mati—Matilal Sur.

Naga—Nagendra Bandyopadhyaya, the Secretary, who was the organiser.

Siva—Siv Charan Chatterjee.

Sambhusuta—Kartik Chandra Pal—dresser.

Mahendra—Mahendra Lal Bose.

Jadupati—Jadunath Bhattacharjee.

Visnu--Visnu Chandra Chatterjee of the Brahma Samaj, who used to sing from behind the wings.

Dharma—Stage manager—Dharmadas Sur.

Kshetra--Kshetra Mohan Ganguly.

Belā—Bel Babu—Amrita Lal Mukherjee.

Pālepāl—Rajendra Nath Paul, one of the well-wishers, and others of his caste.

Bhuban Mohan Chare—Bhuban Mohan's parlour on the Ganges, where rehearsals used to be held.

Chare—Wanders, or Banks of the Ganges.

Gopāla—Gopal Das actor.

Chāsā—Actors of the Sadgopa caste (there were many).

Niler Gorai—*Niladarpana*, put on for performance.

Amrita—Amritalal Bose.

Diner gourav—The fame of Dinabandhu might decline with this acting and on such a stage.

Sthānamāhatmye—on payment of 8 as, persons of all castes saw the performance sitting together unlike other occasions, when seats of Bhadrals used to be separated from those of the ordinary classes.

Here the song refers to actors, though it may also mean the Triveni Tirtha or the junction of the three rivers—the Ganges, the Jamuna and the Saraswati at Triveni, few miles north of Howrah.

However satirical the song was, "it did not", says Viswakosh, "create any bad feeling"—It must be admitted that the song too did not contain the sting apt to be found on similar

satires and Babu Amrita Lal Bose says, "we relished the song and sang it in chorus."

Ardhendu also said, "all our names were so cleverly put in the song that it reflected much credit on the poetic imagination of Girish."*

Our readers would mark the difference in tone and expressions in protests even when one does not agree and this was expected of the 'Father of the Stage.' He was critical to a finish without showing any vulgarity anywhere.

But, however successful the acting was, *Niladarpana* failed to produce any effect in Calcutta, while representations of the drama had produced an electric sensation in mufasil in the year 1861, as we narrated at page 99 of this book. There was really much of comic show and the author very rightly missed the presence of the serious actor in Girish. The *Patrika*, too, was disgusted "at the audience bursting into loud laughter when the poor ryots were crying aloud after being kicked to the ground by the Indigo Saheb."† It rightly endorsed that *Niladarpana* should better be performed at Krishnagore, the scene of the plot and its neighbouring places Jessore and Murshinabad. The *National Paper* also agreed to this view.

Niladarpana was not, however, the first public performance of Bengal. Here, too, Dacca was the pioneer and *Ramabhisek Natak* was staged on the 30th March, 1872. The young men of Dacca, the pick of the society at the time,

* *Rangabhumi*, 1307, 20th Magh.

† *Amritabazar Patrika*, 12th Dec., 1872.

raised money by selling tickets for the performance and devoted it to charitable and educational purposes. A decent stage was built with scenes painted by well-known artists. No school student was, however, allowed to come to see the performance. Tickets were priced at Rs. 4, 2, and Re. 1. The performance was highly appreciated.*

From another account† we have the following :

“A large number of persons witnessed the performance. Amongst others some notable and leading Mahomedans, the District Superintendent of police, Mr. Pogose and a few Christian gentlemen were present. All of them expressed much gratification at the representation of the play. The D.S.P. was so much pleased that while leaving, he expressed that he would not miss the next opportunity of bringing his wife with him. Mr. Pogose too repeated that the amount (Rs. 5) was really spent for a noble cause. All the actors did well and the special amongst them were Rāma, Laksmana, Manthara and Dasaratha.

To come back to The National Theatre, it however, continued showing performances on every Saturday as per following :

7th Dec., *Niladarpana*.

14th Dec., *Jamai Barik* by Dinabandhu

* *Amrita Bazar Patrika* 26th March 1872

† *Amrita Bazar Patrika* 4th April, 1872

21st Dec, *Niladarpana* *

As to *Jamai Barik*, the small farce, Pandit Ramagati Nyaratna says, "The domesticated sons-in-law and fathers-in-law, who have to maintain them, will be brought to their senses on reading the book."

As to the performance, the *Hindu Patriot* of the 16 Dec, 1872 writes as follows :

"Last Saturday night the National Theatre gave a second performance. On the last occasion, Babu Dinabandhu Mitra's *Jamai Barika* or the sons-in-law's barracks—a farce was performed. The play was well-sustained. The sons-in-law performed their parts admirably. The drollery of the scene when they appeared in a group and exchanged notes, was very telling. But some of the female characters were not quite successful. On the whole, however, the performance was good. One would recommend the amateurs to have a repetition of *Niladarpana* and to give a timely notice to the public as many, we are told, are desirous to see it."

The *Patrika*, however wrote a long article about the performance, portions of which would only be necessary. †

"As we shed tears in *Niladarpana*, we laughed in *Jamai Barik*. Each and every actor in this time is a perfect jewel. Every part was well done, especially that of

* Contemporaneous advertisements in *Englishman*
Indian Daily News, *Madhyastha* 8th Poush 1279
B.S. and *Purohit*, 1301, Sravan.

† *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 19th Dec., 1872

Padmalochan, Bagala and Bindu were wonderful. Every time we saw them, we felt extremely delighted. But we were greatly disappointed for the omission of one scene. Kamini lamenting for her husband is an excellent scene in the original, but the whole thing was reported through the mouth of the Mayrani. That marred the whole effect of the scene. This is due to an error of judgment on the part of the author and Dinabandhu should have realised it. There was another mistake for Padmalochan * to sing and dance after the quarrel of the two co-wives. That is not consistent with his character."

The performance of *Niladarpana* on the second night fetched Rs. 450 only and was not of the superior order like the former one. It was also considered necessary to form a body of persons, who would honour those visitors to whom honour was due, select proper dramas and look to the better management of the stage and auditorium. Such was the earnestness that the leading newspapers, including the *Patrika* and *National Paper*, began to offer suggestions for the improvement of the stage, scenes, music * and dances.

An idea as to how the making of the National Theatre was done by the devotion

* The part of Padmalochan was taken by
Ardhendu Sekhar,

of the workers in the field may be gathered from the autobiographical account of Babu Amritlal Bose :

At that time, coolies and servants
 were but few,
 Even they dreaded to work.
 People, therefore, have seen near the
 Laldighi
 Bhuni Babu fixing placards getting
 upon a ladder.
 Now-a-days everything is done by mere
 orders ;
 Even the bearers can now compose
 songs for an opera.

Amrita Madira,

On the 4th and 18th January, 1873 the National troupe played *Navin Tapasvini*—a drama by Dinabandhu, and the *National Paper* wrote :

“Jaladhar, with his quips and cranks and wanton wiles, Bejoy, with the love for Kamini with her softness and grace, charmed the audience.

Indeed, Ardhendu as Jaladhar surpassed all past records, as Girish Chandra said, “this representation was unparalleled in the unparalleled”—*atulaniya madhye atulaniya.*”

The Parika of 12th Dec., 1872 said, “none was pleased with the music.”

Jaladhar was the king's minister but a man devoid of common sense and wanted to make love with Malati, the chaste wife of a Sadagar Ratikanta. Through the intelligence of Mallika, Malati's cousin, he was converted into a *Hondal Kut Kute*, a curious human figure with a monkey's cap, his body immersed in tar and then covered with cotton and afterwards locked up in a big cage. This part and the couplet :

Mālati Mālati Mālati phul
Majāle majāle majāle kul

still feels one with great mirth. It will be no exaggeration to say that Raja Chandra Nath of Natore was beside himself with joy on seeing the part of Jaladhar, played by Ardhendu. The part of the hero (Bejoy) was taken by Babu Amrita Lal Bose, Mallika by Amritalal Mukherjee (Bellbabu) and that of *Navin Tapasvini*, (lit. the young devotee) by Kshetra Ganguly.

All these dramas that formed the first and the most important supply for the National Theatre make Dinabandhu the pet of the age and about the merits of these, the great Bankim Chandra writes as the following

“Dinabandhu's dramas were realistic. The plots originated from incidents, characters of living beings, old novels, English Literature and current tales. *Navin Tapasvini* was one of such dramas. The story of *Rajah Ramini*

Kanta was a real one, the story of *Hondol Kut Kute* was borrowed from old novels and the characters of Jaladhar and Jagadamba were conceived in imitation of Sir John Falstaff's discomfiture in Shakespeare's *Merry Wives of Windsor*."

Lilavati was staged on the 11th January, 1873, but a real Lalit was wanting to give it life. Everybody was so thoroughly charmed with the long passages recited by the inimitable Girish in Rajendra Pal's house about two years ago, that the audience here was displeased with the lifeless acting of the hero, and some really shouted, "lovers should stop love-discourses."*

Hitherto, performances were held on Saturdays only. From the 15th January those continued on Wednesday also. On Wednesday, the 15th January, 1873 *Biyepagla Buda* was presented with some pantomimes, represented for the first time on the public stage. "Pantomime," as the *National Paper* says, "was played with better skill and success than what was expected," and the applause was general and uninterrupted.

The *Madhyastha* also gave a nice description of the following pantomimes :

"The Hunch Back, News about for National Civil Service, Mustifi Sahebka Pucca Tamasa, and the Fairy Land."

* *Madhhastha* 11th Falgun, 1279 B.S,

These comic sketches were not regarded with favour by the thoughtful section of the people, who began to cry for better and newer dramas, but none was found to step into Dinabandhu's place. Ramnarayan's *Yeman Karma Teman Phal* was next staged on the 22nd January, 1873, and his *Navanatak* on the 25th. These two were old dramas. As each week, a new drama was tried pantomimes not even reduced to any writing, were resorted to and acting used to be carried more with the help of a 'prompter.' This was the origin of the actor behind the scenes.*

Next a new drama *Naisho Rupea* from the pen of the illustrious journalist late Babu Sisir Kumar Ghosh was staged on the 8th February, 1873, and as an elaborate social drama, it deals with the prevailing marriage custom of the time, the reverse of what is in vogue in the present day. There was a pernicious custom in vogue in our society when payments as marriage demands were exacted from grooms of Kulin by the brides' fathers who did not allow their daughters to go to father-in-law's house until full payments were made and sons-in-law were treated with harshness and indignities, if before clearing all arrears they came to the house of fathers-in-law. This was more prevalent amongst the Kulins.

The demand of money for Ramdhan's

* Girish's Biography of Ardhendu.

daughter Sarala in the drama being Rs. 900/- the book is so named. Satulal, brother of Ramdhan, with a bubble in hand, figured as the social reformer, whose efforts saved Sarala and got her married to Ranjan, a hearty young man of the village, both of the couple having loved each other :

The drama, original as it was, served its purpose and in the opinion of the *Patrika* "no other writer had shown greater insight into human heart as the author of *Naisho Rupea*, who like Dinabandhu Mitra, attempted to excite laughter or who as Madhusudan, tried to rouse poetical emotions in the poetic or poetical people."

The drama, original as it was, served its purpose and although the *Patrika* paid eulogy for showing a great insight into human heart, we would better reproduce the observations of the illustrious Bankim Chandra,* which run thus :

"There is not a single true drama in Bengali. The author has attempted to write the book in a highly simple and clear style. We can not say, he has been a great success ; yet for the very attempt he deserves just praise. The tyranny of Sanskrit has been so great, that it has become quite unbearable now a-days but the writer, in order to avoid Sanskrit, has fallen to the rusticity of the village dialect.

* *Bangadarsan*, 10th Falgun, 1279.

“The chief merit of the book consists in showing self-less love. This makes us forgive the author for all his short-comings. There is little interest in the drama, and Satulal is a queer person but not improbable; there is nothing in this character for which the author may be justly proud. Satulal is Neemchand in Hemp-smoking and therefore Neemchand’s second. But it can be equally remarked that it means no mean credit to a modern playwright. Satulal has a full development. He can be recognised by his face and even from distance by his very voice. We cannot but laugh at his words when we are by his side; again when we notice tears in him, we feel strongly attracted towards him, Satulal has got so many virtues that it is no wonder that he would stand by Neemchand resting his hand on the latter’s shoulders.—We conclude our criticism, but if this is the first attempt of “the unknown writer,” we are sure, his works will be prized when he will be more experienced in tackling language and emotions.”

Regarding the performance, *The National Paper* commented :

“Ramdhan, the Brahmin, father of Sarala, the heroine of the play, mainiained his part very well. The part of Gopimohan Bhattacharjee, another Brahmin, was well acted. He excited great laughter during his conversation with his wife. Kanai Ghoshal, a village gentle-

man, who afterwards proves to be the father of Ranjan, acted his part to the satisfaction of the audience. His conversation with his wife Shashi's mother in the last act was very pathetic. Satulal, the younger brother of Ramdhan was really comical. Satu is a Ganja-smoker with an open heart. He excited great laughter whenever he appeared on the stage. In the third scene of Act III, the professional disputes between the Allopathic Doctor, the Homeopathic Doctor (Niloo Babu) and the native Kaviraj were very amusing.

"In the fifth Act the bridal hall was a beautiful spectacle. Navin Babu's short address in the Sabhā on the transient state of worldly happiness in the tone of a Brahma preacher elicited cheers. Amongst the female characters Sarala's mother, Shashi's mother and Shashi acquitted themselves well. The love scenes between Ranjan and Sarala were tolerably represented. Ranjan was very hasty and rather flipp out. Sarala's expression, motion and gestures were graceful and quite feminine. We are very glad to notice this time the presence of several respectable European gentlemen and ladies in the Theatre ; a judge of the High Court also graced the Theatre with his presence."*

Ardhendu appeared in the role of Satulal, Amrita Basu in that of Ranjan and Kshetra

* *The National Paper*, Feb., 1873.

Ganguly of Sarala. In appreciation of Ardhendu, we are in possession of the following opinion from Girish Chandra Ghosh :

“Those, who beheld that performance, said before the author himself that what was represented by Ardhendu was not possible from any other actor, even of the English stage. His calling for bids *Naisho Rupea Ek, Naisho Rupea Do, Naisho Rupea Teen* and other expressions used in soliloquy though an improvement on the author, were, extraordinary, original and very interesting.”*

Of Ardhendu, Girish Babu said that his comic acting was of a very high order. When he used to play a part, he was something different from the part itself ; the extraordinary comic element blended with seriousness was Ardhendu’s creation and it was more appealing to the audience who used to see Ardhendu all by himself and not the part he played. In the farces and pantomimes† too, Ardhendu was marvellous to a degree, and unique in character. He was at his best in *Biyepagla Budo* “when lying down alone in his bed, he expatiated in a beautiful and well paused soliloquy on the prospects of the forthcoming nuptials, which opened on him like a new Elysium.”‡

* *Biography of Ardhendu by girish*

† *Biyepagla Buda, Kubjar kughatan, Nava Vidyalaya, Mustafi Saheb ka Pucca Tamasa, Paristhan Belati Babu, Model School, Subscription book and Green Room of a Private Theatre.*

‡ *Indian Mirror* 22nd, January, 1873.

About this time Debcarson, a humorous actor from the continent arrived in Calcutta with Mr. and Mrs. Hall and entertained the public, specially the Europeans, at the Grand Opera House by his comic songs and sketches. The performance began from a Thursday of November 1872 with *Dakghar* and other shows* and notice used to be scattered broadcast '*Dekho, Debcarson Sheb ka Pucca Tamasa.*'

On the 7th December, 1872 the very night when the public theatre was opened at Jorasanko, Debcarson caricatured the Bengalees in a farce as *Bengali Babu*. He used to draw large crowds, earned a good deal of money and was much applauded when he sang :

‘I am a very good Bengalee Babu :

‘I keep my shop at Radhabazar ;

‘I live in Calcutta, eat my dalbhat

‘And smoke my Hookka.’†

* “The Bengali Babu”, “Professor” “The School Master”, “Police Court”, “The Blind Begger” “The Bombay Parsee”.

† Debcarson stayed only a couple a months in Calcutta and was spoken of with interest on the columus of the *Englishman* as will appear from the following :

“The inimitable Deb give his last regular performance at the Opera House, on Wednesday night and attendance was full. Though not such as might have been expected, Deb’s part of the performance was capital and we are

On the Bengali stage, however, there was only one man, who was a match for this Saheb and that was Babu Ardhendu Sekhar Mustafi. To give a retort to Debcarsen's above caricature, Ardhendu, dressed as a Saheb with an old hat, torn coat and dirty trousers and with Violin (Behala) in hand, used to show *Mustafi Sahebka Pucca Tamasa* to caricature the so-called Sahebs in the following song, which he used to sing with gestures :

“Hām vada sāhev hai duniyāme
 “None can be compared hāmārā sāth ;
 “Mister Mustafi” name hāmārā
 “Chātgāon me merā Vilāt.
 “Lord of all Hai Ham
 “Chunagali* mere mokam
 “Coat pini, pentagoon pini
 “Pini merā trousers ;
 “Every two years new suit pini
 “Direct from Chandney bazar.
 “Dirty niggār hate hāmāre
 “Vadda maāyla āche, chho, chho, chho”!

By this and other comic sketches of the like nature, (generally known to all as *Mustafi Saheb ka Pucca Tamasa*), Mr. Mustafi who

glad to hear that he will take a benefit at the town Hall before leaving Calcutta with his Company. He deserves, and ought to have a bumper house.”

The Englishman, Friday, Dec, 20, 1872.

* A dirty place about that time was Baithak khana where a few low class native or Anglo Indian Christians, men and women, used to live together.

was henceforth regarded in the stage as Mustafi Saheb or *Saheb* by all, was really a match for Debcarson, and both drew equally crowded houses by their pucca tāmāsā, though in the opinion of Girish Chandra, Debcarson's humour was of a much lower order than that of the Bengali rival.

There is also another incident, which needs mention here. A few months before the "National Theatre" showed its performance before the public, Mrs. Lewis arrived in Calcutta with her Dramatic and Burlesque Company and entertained the public with a number of plays and farces. The Opening Night of the "Lewis Theatre" was the 28th September, 1872, at the Town Hall. After some time she built a stage at the Chowringhee Road on the Maidan on the model of *The English Stage* and was popular here. Mr. Geo Lane Anderson and G.H. Leonard were artists on her stage and she continued showing performances till 1876. It might be that this theatre and Debcarson's shows, were the immediate incentives to the starting of the Public Theatre in hot haste.

Bharat-Mata was also staged on the 15th Feb., 1873 at the instance of Babu Sisir Kumar Ghose, editor *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, and of this we shall give a detailed description hereafter.

As all possible dramas were now exhausted, the party at this time wanted to play *Michael*

Madhusudan Dutt's *Krisnakumari Natak*, the well known tragedy of the day. But to make it a success worthy of the drama, after the performance of the play at the Sobhabazar Private Theatrical Company, they knew that the part of Bheem Sing could not be rendered by any body in the troupe except by their revered leader Girish Chandra Ghosh, whose deep, clear and resonant voice with his king-like appearance fitted in well with the part and so all came to Girish Babu at his house in a body. Girish agreed to play the part on one condition that his name would be in the advertisement as Bheem Sing "by an amateur.." They, however, added 'distinguished' before the word 'amateur' and appeared with their leader in the main role on the 22nd Feb, 1873, (just two months and a half after they had separated,) and Rajah Chandra Nath of Natore, who had been very much pleased with Girish's acting and postures during rehearsals, himself dressed Girish with his own princely costume and his jewelled belt. Michael Madhusudan was present during the first performance and highly praised the histrionic talents of Girish Chandra. The acting of Girish was marvellous. It is said, so deep was his voice and so strong his feelings that when he called thrice name of "Mānsingha", "Mansingha", "Mansingha", two spectators of the Stall fainted on the first night. Equally heart-rending was his expression to his wife at the death of his

daughter—when he exclaimed, “Mahisi, do you see your Krisna,—Mahisi, tomār Krisnake dekhcho”?

Mahendra Babu was in the role of Rani Ahalyā and drew tears from the audience by the tragic part. To Kshetra Gangule, the dramatist addressed thus : “*Krisnakumari*, you have done to perfection.”

Dharmadas says—“we do not now get even one hundredth of the encouragement, which all sections of the Calcutta public including the wealthiest citizens gave us then.”

The cast was distributed as follows :

Balendra	... Nagendra.
Dhanadas	... Mustafi Saheb.
Jagat Sing	... Kiran Banerjee
Mantri	... Gopal Chandra Das.
Satyadas	... Mati Sur.
Krisnakumari	... Kshetra Ganguly.
Vilasavati	... Bel Babu.
Rani Ahalya	... Mahendra Bose.
Madanika	... Ashutosh Bose.

Girish's presence was also required at that time, as between the members, disputes were going on as to who would be in charge of money, etc. About a month before this, we find in *Madhyam*^{or}, *The National* (22nd Jan., 1873) as also in other papers that some actors—Babu Mahendra Lal Bose, Mati Lal Sur, Amrita Lal Pal and Rajendra Nath Pal—members—
notified in papers that according to a

meeting held on the 19th January, Babu Nava-gopal Mitra, Monomohan Bose and Hemanta Kumar Ghose, were made arbitrators.* *Madhyastha* apprehended that the failure in mediation might require even the intervention of law courts. The difference arose in a wrong move of Devendra Nath that his brother Negendra, Amrita Bose and Dharmadas should declare themselves as proprietors to which Dharmadas objected.

Matters grew worse and in a meeting of members presided over by Babu Hemanta Kumar Ghose, both parties attended, but could not come to any definite settlement. We next find an advertisement in *Englishman* and *Indian Daily News* of the 24th Jan, 1873 and subsequent dates, as the following :

National Theatrical Society--

“At a Meeting it was resolved that Nagendra Nath Banerjee, the former Secretary of the Society, be discharged and Babu Mati Lal Sur be appointed in his place.”

Within 10 or 11 days, difference seemed, however, to have been settled and that Babu Nagendra Nath Banerjee continued to be the Secretary.

* *National Paper, Madhyastha.*
Dharmadasa's *Autobiography*

It was at this time* that Girish was called both to play the part of Bheem Singh, as well as to control and direct the management and the above settlement was the immediate effect of his arrival and mediation.

Girish wrote in Ardhendu's biography :

But at the time, men, who posed to be patrons in order to appropriate the sale proceeds of the theatre, declared the honest difference of opinion I held, as enmity towards the theatre. But I had to join it when the drama of *Krisnakumari* was staged. I was selected for the role of Bhimsinha. At that time the difference between the two sections became more intense and wide. I refused to appear unless my name was advertised as an amateur. But the avaricious amongst them objected to it fearing that it might frustrate their object. But when they found me unyielding, it was advertised, "Bheemsinha by a distinguished amateur."

Girish Babu became henceforth the director†

* *Madhyastha*, 13th Magh 1279 *National Paper* 22nd Jan. 1873; *National Paper*, 12th March, 1873 and *Madhyastha*, 3rd Chaitra 1279, *I. D. News*, 5th Feb. 1873 and *A. B. Patrika* 30th Jan., 1873 and also Dharmadasa's *Reminiscences*.

Indian Mirror, 26th Feb. 1873 says that the editor of the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* and Girish were the only directors and hoped that under both, the latter being one of the best native amateur actors of the town and combining in himself a good education with an excellent taste and a tolerable knowledge of human nature, the National Theatre will daily improve.

and united the artists, went on merrily for some time but owing to excessive rains in the early spring of that year, they had to close the theatre at Sanyal-bari in a few nights only. On the last night, 8th March 1873 after a few Pantomimes, Michael's *Burosalikar Ghare Row* and *Yeman Karma Teman Phal*, they took leave of the public with a timely composed song from the pen of Girish Chandra, sung by Babu Behari Bose (Jyethā Behari) in female dress :

The song reads thus :

“With a sorrowful heart I take your leave
 May I ask the wise not to forget me ;
 In the midst of beauty and joy
 My heart withers in despair.
 Though the copious rains make all happy
 The earth has put on her vernal garb ;
 But it grieves me more, to depart *
 In this season of joy.
 Though hope to appear in a new guise,
 On a new built stage.”

After the theatre was closed apparently for rains, but really for jealousies, a dispute arose about the possession of the theatre's property—its

* After the song was finished, all those present, began to express regret. The ^{plan} ~~plan~~ to say 'why do you stop, why bid adieu ^{to us} ~~to us~~ Why should we forget you, we would come wherever you would go.'

funds, dress, furniture and other things. The dispute could not be amicably settled and it gave rise to two parties. Amrita Babu joined Ardhendu's party. The second party was in fact led by Rajendra Pal. Dharmadas Sur was in that party. It is even now talked about, that the disruption of the National Theatre was due to the excessive greed of those, who wanted to be the party-leaders.*

Babu Amritalal Bose also agreed that those, who were in charge of funds, could not render any account and the disputes arose about that.

The dress used to remain then at Nagendra Nath's house but then the stage and scenes remained with Dharmadas. An opportunity soon arose for the prominence of the Theatre.

It was at this time (3rd Feb., 1873), His Excellency Lord Northbrook, the Viceroy of India, laid the foundation stone of the Calcutta Native Hospital, which was to be built on the banks of the river at Pathuriaghata. Dr. Macnamara, a specialist in Opthalmey was collecting subscriptions at the time. Babu Rajendra Nath Pal and Dharmadas Sur in an interview with Dr. Macnamara suggested a benifit performance and the Doctor gladly agreed to ^{only} hire the Town Hall for the ^{latter} performance ^{and} bear necessary expenses. The condition was that all proceeds of sale of

* Ardhendu's *Biography* by Girish.

tickets would be given him for the purpose. They took a week's time and saw Girish, as within so short a time they could never venture to appear on the stage without his help. As the purpose was noble, Girish agreed and took upon him the task of coaching the actors, himself playing the role of Mr. Wood. *Nila-darpana* was selected for the performance.

Only three classes of seats (Reserved seats Rs. 4, First class Rs. 2, and Second class Re. 1) were issued and the sale proceeds amounted to Rs. 1100/- only, of which Rs. 400 met the necessary expenses. Almost all the disciples and colleagues of Girish Chandra—Mati Sur, Mahendra Bose, Abinash Kar, Gopal Chandra Das, participated in the performance. The part of Sairindhri was played by Babu Radha-govinda Kar (afterwards Dr. R. G. Kar), Radhamadhav's brother.

The performance was shown on the 29th March, 1873 (Saturday) and the Town Hall was very finely decorated with flowers, leaves and proper lights, Dr. Macnamara being himself present at the reception. The play was a grand success and Girish Babu so well fitted his part with the make up, movements and articulations of voice that people ^{thought} ~~thought~~ that Mr. Wood's part was being played ^{by} ~~by~~ a Bengali-knowing English friend of the Doctor. Girish's representation received greater appreciation by the cultured audience though Ardhendu

could carry the mass more powerfully. The reason is for the difference in the two distinct conceptions. Ardhendu represented Wood as a hard-hearted greedy Englishman, whereas Girish showed him as one not cruel by nature, but doing his duty as an English settler (merchant) with vengeance.

The scene where Rogue was assaulting Kshetramani moved the audience so much that Babu Dina Dayal Bose, Babu of one of the most renowned Barristers, Mr. Woodroff (Justice Woodroff's father), asked for police help for the arrest of the Saheb. It was a regret that few Europeans were present, but that they wanted to see another performance, was echoed in the following observations of the *Englishman* of the 31st March, 1873 :

The National Performance at Town Hall

On Saturday night (29th March), the members of the Calcutta National Theatre performed in the Town Hall the play of *Niladarpana* for the benefit of the National Hospital. It is a great pity that so short a notice was given, as on that account very few Europeans were present. However, the natives gathered very strongly on the occasion and be testified by their repeated plaudits that much they enjoyed the performance. The acting was exceedingly good throughout. We hope, the management will give another performance shortly."

We have already mentioned that Nagendra Nath and Ardhendu were not in this party. They, however, did not fail to assert their official connection. When at a special meeting held on the 26th March, 1873, by Dharmadas's party at the Baithak Khana house of Rasik Neogi on the banks of the Ganges it was resolved, amongst other things, that Babu Amrita Lal Pal be nominated Honorary Secretary in place of the above gentlemen.* They too made a counter move. When all preparations were going thus on for the above performance of *Niladarpana* at the Town Hall, they not only threw the blame on Girish Chandra, but issued a notice on the 29th March, the night of performance as follows :

“We are sorry to announce that owing to a breach amongst the members of the above society through the instrumentality of one of the directors, Babu Girish Chandra Ghose, the play of *Niladarpana*, to take place this evening at the Town Hall, is hereby post-poned till further notice.”

Ardhendu Sekhar Mustafi—Master.

Nagendra Nath Banerjee, Hony. Secretary.

29th March, 1873.

Of course, Babu Amritalal Banerjee newly appointed Secretary issued a ~~press~~ contradiction immediately to the following effect :

* *Vide, Englishman and I. D. News, Advertisement, March. 25th—29th, 1873*

"Gentlemen, friends and patrons are requested not to lend their ears to the above advertisement of several persons, who are against the theatre."

National Theatre,
Office, Bagbazar,
29th March, 1873.

Amrita Lal Pal
Hony. Secretary.

As no counter move was able to stop the performance of *Niladarapana* under Girish, Ardhendu-Nagen's party calling itself "Hindu National" rented the Grand Opera House and showed performances for three nights on :

5th April—1. Model School and its examination. 2. Belati Babu. 3. Distribution of Title of Honour. 4. "Mustifi Saheb ka Pucca Tamasa" followed by 5. "Sarmisthā" with Nagendra Babu as Yayāti, Ardhendu as Vakāsur, Sib Chandra as Sukrāchāryya, Bel Babu as Devajani and Kshetra Mohan as Sarmisthā.*

12th April—Tragedy of "Vidhava-vivāha."

19th April—"Kinchit Jalayog, Ekei-kibale Sabhyatā, Dispensary, Charitable Dispensary, Bhārat Sangit.

* Private boxes to admit 5	Rs. 20
Lower stage to admit 4	„ 16
Dress Circle ...	„ 4
Stalls (front) ...	„ 3
„ back ...	„ 2
Pit ...	Re. 1

On the 26th April, 1873, "Hindu National" showed a performance of *Niladarpana* at the Howrah Railway Theatre, which was rather adversely criticised by one Dinanath Dhar in *A. B. Patrika*, 12th June, 1872 :

“Mr. Wood out-did his part, so was not ably rendered. He ought to read the passages in Hamlet, sc. ii, Act III.”

But unable to do much in the face of competition with Girish Chandra, they left for Dacca by the 1st week of May.* Before they left, they commenced building a stage at the house of Babu Kaliprasanna Sinha.†

The National Theatre again gave another benefit performance on the 5th April at the Town Hall for the Charitable Section of the Indian Reform Association staging *Sadhavar Ekadasi* and *Vilapa* (lamentation of Bhārata-mātā). But the sales fell off this night owing to competition of Hindu National.

On the 12th April, 1873, the National Theatre affixed their stage at the house of Raja Radhakanta Dev, showing the performance of *Krisnakumari Natak*. But a very untoward event occurred that day. There was a womanoucher in the name of Amrita Babu, successful some

* Amrita Lal Bose's *Reminiscences Puratan Prasang* 2nd Paryaya, p. 128.

† *Amrita Bazar Patrika* 15th May, 1873.

money owed by the National Theatre to him. Amrita Lal Babu with the advice of three directors got an order of attachment before judgment and had the scenes and stage of the National Theatre attached. The money was, however, paid by Kumar Girindra Krishna Dev Bahadur of the Sobhabazar* House and the performance went on as usual. The Raj Kumars, who had once attained great success by staging this very drama before, appreciated the performance by Girish Chandra's party very much and encouraged the players. Kumar Amarendra Krishna, who had played the part of Rani Ahalya, highly praised Mahendra Babu for the part. About Ahalya, Girish himself wrote :

The audience could not restrain their tears at the performance of the Rani in the Drama, even though in appearance he did not look quite upto the mark. He who acted the part in the performance at the Sobhabazar Raj House forgot his jealousy and greatly praised the rival actor.*

On the 19th April, 1873, they showed the performance of *Niladarpana* and on the 26th some pantomimes, Piano being conducted by young ^{1st son} (on) the age of 7 and 10.

* *Indian Daily News and Amrita Bazar Patrika* 'National Theatre, Calcutta, Saturday, 12th April 1873. The performance to take place at the elegant *Natmandir* of Raja Radhakanta Dev with Dharmadas as Stage manager.

On the 10th May, 1873, they showed a performance of *Kapalakundala* of Bankim Chandra. The dramatisation was made by Girish Chandra, at Sanyal-bari, though not staged there, and the parts were coached by him. On the night of the performance here, the manuscript of the drama, however, disappeared in a mysterious way. But Girish managed the whole thing in such a wonderful manner (by extempore prompting) that no body could feel about the loss of the dramatised book, and the play with Matilal Sur as Kapalika, and Mahendra Bose as Navakumar was a great success. This was however, advertised as the Grand Farewell night or † the last night of the seasons and the "National" closed its performance and next pursued the Hindu National at Dacca.

The Hindu National, however, had already met with a hearty reception at Dacca. They lived at the house of Babu Radhika Mohan Roy, brother of Mohini Babu, Zeminder and Banker of Dacca and showed their performance on the East Bengal Stage of which we mentioned before, and the English Band of Nawab Gani Mia's house and the concert of Mohini Babu's house were in attendance. ^{Mr. Amrita} Babu says : ^{success}

* *Natyamandir*, p. 919, Vol. I.

† Vide *Amrita Bazar Patrika and Indian Daily News*, 8th May, 1873.

“Babus Kali Prasanna Ghose, Editor, *Bandhav* and Abhaya Charan Das (Rai Bahadur), Dr. Kedarnath Das used to attend the performances and the public appreciated it. Mr. Kemp of the *Bengal Times*, however, made jesting criticism. We also satirised Kemp in a farce :—Mr. Rampini the then Joint Magistrate, and Mr. Witheral, D. S. P. joined in laughter.”*

It goes without saying that the Dacca people appreciated the performances very much,†

The Hindu National staged Niladarpana on 17th May, 1873, on 21st May Sadhabar Ekadashi, on 24th Nabin Tapaswani, on 25th Niladrappana, on 29th Jamaibarik, on 31st Krishnakumari Natak. Ardhendu Sekhar was the talk of Dacca, such popularity he gained. The weekly paper *Dacca Prakas* relates on 20th Jaistha 1280 B. S:

“In Nabin Tapaswini” Ardhendu appeared in the role of Jaladhar. He did so well that a better representation is not at all possible. Vidyabhusan, Mallika and Tapaswini too did well. Malati, Kamini and Jagadamba are not bad but the other characters could not give pleasure.” Regarding Naisho Rupeya also it says “Satulal is very successful, but though delivery, on good passages were not committed to merit and b Ardhendu Sakhar appeared as Satulal.”

* *Reminiscences of Amrita Bose*, p. 129. *Puratan Pradanga*.

† *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 22nd May' 1873.

Regarding "Krishna Kumari" also it says that audience was large. Madonika, Dhonadas and Bhimsing were well-represented, but for failure in memory what was meant appeared quite different (Ake ar hoiāchhe).

The review is impartial. Everybody knew that Ardhendu Babu used to depend more on prompting.

The same paper writes on the 9th Ashar 1280 B.S. (just after the Hindu National left Dacca on the 17th June 1873) the following :

"Ardhendu Babu the master of the party is an extraordinary actor. His Golok Bose, Wood, Cultivator and Pagolini (Sabitri) in Nildarpan, Jaladhar in N.T. Dhono Das and Bhim Singh in Krishna Kumari, Kirtiram Ghose and Tarkalankar in Bidhaba Bibaha, Nimchand in Sadhabar Ekadashi, Chor (thief) and a Jamai (son-in-law) in Jamai Bareek used to be master performance which has been highly spoken of by all. Such a master-artist is scarcely seen.

"Kiron Banerjee who appeared as Torap, Rai Charan, Mokteer in Niladarpana, Abhoy Kumar in Jamai Bareek, Karta in Sadhabār Ekadashi, Jagat Sinha in Krishna Kumari is also a good actor.

"Amritalal Mukherjee's performance of smart or restless women met with success. He was seen as Kshetromoni, Mokteer and Rai Charan in Niladarpana and as Mallika (N.T.), Madanika, Rashobati, Soudamini and Kamini.

"Kshetro Gangolee is successful in the role of mild and fair women as in Saralata (N.D.), Kamini, Krishnakumari Sulochana and Panchi.

"Manager Nagendra Banerjee appeared as Nabin Madhob and Physician in (N.D), Raja in N. T., Ranendra Singh in Krishnakumari, Monmotha, Gurumahasaya and bridegroom in Bidhaba Bibaha, Atal in Sadhabar Ekdashi, Padmalochan, Jamai and Bairagi in Jamai Bareek. Although he has no defects, his acting has not charmed anybody."

'Nabanatak' was acted badly. On the last night of performance Ardhendu Babu says "we shall come to Dacca again." To this Dacca Prokas rejoins :—

"Particular person or persons has or have no doubt done well, but no drama was perfect and thus the party has not been gainer to the extent it expected. If they mean to come to Dacca, they must come ready with their parts. But Dacca would appreciate more the Pouranik pieces."

The National on the other hand under the management of Rājendra Pal and Dharmadas Sur and with artists Mohendra Bose, Mati Soor, Sib Chatterjee, Gopal Das and others, reached Dacca on the 22nd May and advertised :

"The Real National has now arrived."

They began to stay at the house of Radhika Mohan Mohan Roy and showed performances at Jibon Babu's compound at Lakshmibazar, rather at an out-of-the-way quarter.

They were late in the field and could not secure the patronage of the local gentry. The worst of it was that Girish Chandra Ghose whose co-operation they had counted much could not join the party as Mr. Atkinson in whose office he used to work did not grant him leave.

National performed *Niladarpana* on the 27th May, *Naisho Rupea* on 30th and so on, till they left by 10th or 12 June. About its performance the *Dacca Prokas* (Jaist 2, 1280 B S.), writes :

“Scenes, concert and materials are good but performance is worse than Hindu National. Rai Charan, Roge, Sairindhri and Kabiraj are better in comparison and Torap though a finished actor could not produce the effect it deserved owing to hoarseness of voice.”

On the 9th Ashar it wrote— “National left and could not make any profit owing to comparatively defective acting. For extravagance and imprudent expenditure they have incurred losses. Keeping debts to the extent of Rs. three to four hundred they left unnoticed, and thus the impression that people of this part considered people of Calcutta as cheats and swindlers is confirmed.”

The above remark of *Dacca Prakas*, was unfair, injudicious and prejudiced and on examination of all facts, we come to the conclusion that the charge was a groundless one. Babu Abinas Ch. Kar at once sent a rejoinder

on the following week (vide 'Dacca Prakas' Ashar 16,1280B.S.) to the effect that no doubt the party was in debt to the extent of Rs.450/- but two of the party have been staying there, and through the sympathy of persons like Khajeh Nawab Abdul Gani, Babu Mohini Mohan Das and Dr. Kedar Nath Ghose (authorities of the East Bengal Stage) the debts were all cleared. Mr. Kar also threatened the paper with taking suitable steps to vindicate their characters unless the above passages were withdrawn. "Dācca Prakas" too on the next day expressed that it did not know that two persons of the party were still at Dacca and might have cleared the debts, and the matter ended there. Thus the Hindu National with partial success and National with no success came back one after the other. Both the sections suffered losses. *National* suffered much greater and had to come back by mortgaging the scenes for passage. Both parties returned to Calcutta and *National* used to have rehearsals at Bhuvan Babu's garden-house on the Ganges, while the Hindu National did at Nagen or Ardhendu's house.

One good result, however, came out of the evil. Prosperity divided them, but adversity united again. Thus, on the 10th of July, 1873, united they gave a benefit performance of *Krisnakumari Natak** in aid of the orphans of the poet Madhu Sudan Dutt, after his untimely death, which

* *Indian Daily News*, A. B. Patrika, 10th July 1873 and *Hindu Patriot*, 14th July, 1873.

melancholy event took place on the 29th June, 1873. The united troupe played in full strength at the house of Raja of Dighapatia (Rajbati) during the first-rice ceremony of Kumar Pramadanath. This was the first instance of the party's going outside on contract,—Girish, Dharmadas, Amritalal and Nagendranath not having accompanied it. There were four performances at Dighapatia,

On the way, there were more performances at Rajshahi. The troupe staged some plays in Sept., 1873 at Berhampur, Murshidabad, under the name of "National." Babu Bankim Chandra Chatterjee then a Deputy Magistrate here, became familiar with the party.*

On the 7th Dec, both National and Hindu National celebrated the first anniversary of Public Theatre under the presidency of Raja Kali Krishna Dev Bahadur when Babu Monomohan Bose delivered a very interesting lecture.†

The troupe in the old Jorasanko site staged some dramas : *Hemalata Natak*‡ (a martial

* Ardhendu Babu's *reminiscences*, *Rangabhumi*, 11th Falgun, 1307.

† *Englishman*, 10th Dec, 1873 and *Madhyastha*, Poush, 1280.

‡ *Hemalata Nataka*. the parts of Satyashakha, Hemalata, Bikram Singh and Kamala Devi were very well done ; the performance was a great success.

drama) by Haralal Ray on the 13th December, 1873, *Kamale Kamini* on the 20th and *Hemlata* again on the 27th, when it was merged with The Great National Theatre of Bhubon Mohon Neogi—a permanent structure worthy of the name of a stage, and of this we shall speak later on.

To recapitulate, we find that in the face of the aristocratic theatres, Girish conceived the plan of having performances for the middle class men and matured it with all success, and Dinabandhu supplying him with dramas, Girish worked wonders. *Indeed, Neemchand laid the foundation for the future Stage of Bengal.*

During the time of the next drama, *Lilavati*, the stage was named “National” and this again became “public theatre” with *Niladarpana*. But it is an undeniable fact that it became permanent, when it was open to the public, but Girish had then severed his connection with it.

Chief in the first two dramas, but absent in the third ! No doubt, he did not take part, out of a principle, but his spirit worked there. *Niladarpana* was chosen by him, parts were selected by him, and his disciples, who appeared in the first two, appeared in the third as well. Dharmadas Sur, too, was the stage manager in all the three dramas.

Further, because they could not do without him, they came to him, when *Krisnakumari Natak* was put on, the bill within first two

months, greeted him as their guide with all persuasion and selected him as their arbitrator, when disputes arose. Indeed, Girish Chandra was the master-spirit from whom all inspiration came, and the National Theatre was like a son to him, whom the father begot, nursed gave a decent training, but was absent, when the formal *Namakarana* Ceremony was performed. In short, Girish Chandra Ghose was really the *Father of the Bengali Stage*. The late lamented Amritalal Bose, himself a great actor and brilliant play-wright, used to call himself, Mahendralal, Matilal. and his name-sake Bel Babu as moonlight deriving its splendour from the beams of the sun-like Girish. Thus, he used always to refer about him :

“Drunken, his feet shaking, when
Nime Dutt appears on stage ;
Bengal first saw then
Her first stage-father.”

In the next Volumes of this book, we shall find how the huge contribution in all kinds of dramas came from Girish, how he pleased the audience with his masterly acting, which was no inferior to that of a Garrick or Roscius and how he re-built the National Stage, the Star Theatre, the Minerva Theatre, the Kohinoor Theatre, and ultimately turned ‘Minerva’ into an ideal stage of Bengal. But even without considering those we may undoubtedly call Girish Chandra Ghose as the Father of the Bengali Stage from the time of *Sadhavar Ekadasi*.

Chapter IX

Bengal Theatre

The year 1873 marks the stage of further innovation in the Bengali Stage. On the Sixteenth August, 1873, "The Bengal Theatre" was started at 9/3, Beadon Street, Calcutta, mainly through the exertion of Babu Sarat Chandra Ghose, grandson of the millionaire Chhatu Babu, whom the readers have found in the role of *Sakuntala* at the latter's House. He found an able co-adjutor in the well known actor Babu Beharilal Chatterjee, who had already figured in *Kulinkulasarvasva* at the house of Jayram Bysak of Charakdanga, in *Venisamhara* at the house of Babu Kali Prasanna Sinha and also in *Sakuntala*—in female characters in all the three plays. It was at the last place, Sarat Babu met him and became his friend. It was this Behari Babu, who played the part of Bheemsingh in the Sobhabazar Raj House, in 1867, and as Indraneel in *Padmavati*, and thus on the Bengali stage, he figured prominently long before Babu Girish Chandra Ghose came into the dramatic field.

The performance at Jorasanko by the National Theatrical Company created a desire in Sarat Babu's mind to start a public theatre and

through the able collaboration of Beharilal, began to mature his plans. The open space in front of Chhatu Babu's house, where now the Beadon Square Post Office stands, was taken lease of by Sarat Babu from his maternal uncle Babu Anath Nath Deb and the stage was built there. The roof consisted of ordinary tiles and the plinth was kancha (of earth). Sarat Babu was the proprietor and Behari Babu became manager. The combination of both-the organising capacity of Sarat Babu and the qualities of Beharilal as an actor, master and dramatist—made the *Bengal Theatre* popular and Beharilal remained the life long manager of the company, till April, 1901, when the *Bengal Theatre* had to be closed, owing to the lamented death of Beharilal. None continued to be the manager of a theatrical company at one stretch so long as Beharilal. *Bengal Theatre* has, therefore, a continuous and growing record of its own, and Beharilal too must have his place due in the history of the Bengali stage, which is certainly not inconsiderable.

Actresses on the Stage

Bengal Theatre, however, is credited with making certain reforms on the stage for which it deserves thanks. To turn theatre into a school of art, it is necessary to introduce female artists on the stage, as male actors can not do it for any length of time—boys from respectable

classes can not be available and the standard is not reached even by the best boy-artists. It was not also possible at that time to secure decent or respectable women for this purpose. Actresses had, therefore, to be secured from the women of the town and until and unless cultured women of broader views come forward from respectable families, theatres have no other option but to go on with actresses of the present status only. It was further when the National Theatre was started, we find some weighty arguments in the *Education Gazette* from one Khsetra Nath Bhattacharjee :

“The more such theatres are started, acting will be improved and drama composed in competition. The present theatres have no female artists on the staff. This will be soon considered as a defect and means will be sought to remedy this defect. Some of the prostitutes are trying to receive education. If a few of such educated women are secured, happy consequences will out-weigh any mischief done.”

These opinions carried much weight and the times also helped the introduction. It was at this time that Babu Ram Chand Mukherjee, Dewan of the famous millionaire Babu Ashutosh Dev had an Opera party and some women appeared as actresses and singers there. The Oriental Theatre of Howrah also introduced females from the 15th February, 1873, and the next step was taken by the National Liceum from the 7th Feb.* of the same year. We have

also an account that from 7th May, 1873, a party opened *Vidyasundar* under the name of Great India Theatre, "where some actresses appeared in the roles of Vidyā and Mālīni.*

From the very beginning Sarat Babu through the suggestion of Michael Madhusudan Dutt, † Pandit Satyavrata Samasrami and Mr. O. C. Dutt. (Sarat Babu's brother-in-law), introduced females in the Bengal Theatre and four actresses were taken at first in the person of Elokeshi, Jagattarini, Shyamasundari and Golap, though only two of them in the roles of Devajāni and Devikā (Sarmisthā's attendant) appeared on the stage in the opening night i.e. the 16th August 1873. Thus we find that as Lebedeff's theatre in 1795, Nabin's Theatre of 1832 and the above two theatres, were all very short-lived, Bengal Theatre alone is credited, as being the pioneer to introduce the important change, and the change has received the support of all right thinking men today, although at the beginning many persons of lead and light opposed the idea vehemently. It is said that Pandit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, who was one of the patrons and supporters of Sarat Babu from the time his Theatre was contemplated, severed his

*Vide, *Indian daily News* of contemporaneous period.

†Michael said—"It is very unnatural that men with signs of moustache do appear for females. If you mean theatre, you must take actresses. Introduce women and I shall write dramas for you."

connection with it at the introduction of females. The public and local papers were also indignant over it.

Michael Madhusudan Dutt wrote *Maya-Kanan* for representation in the opening night and the company purchased this piece and *Beesh Ki Dhanurgoon* from the author, but as the poet's death marked it as an omen (indeed, with death the theatre began and with death it closed), they postponed it for a future performance and put *Sarmisthā* on the boards for the first night, applying all the sale proceeds in aid of the orphans, left helpless by the death of their guide, patron and philosopher Sri Madhusudan, the illustrious poet of Bengal.

The cast was as follows:—

Debjani — Elokeshi, Devika — Jagattarini, Jajati — Sarat Ghose, Sukracharyya—Behari Chatterjee. In subsequent nights Golap appeared as Sarmistha.

Now, as to the success of the play and other details, we would better quote the remarks of a correspondent S. N. M. of Nandabag, Calcutta in *Englishman** who wrote as follows.

“On Saturday last, I went to see the first performance of Bengal Theatre in Beadon Street in front of the house of Ashutosh Dev. It is erected in the fashion of Lewis Lyceum Theatre Hall. On Saturday last, the celebrated *Sarmistha* was brought on the stage

* *Vide Englishman*, 27th August, 1873.

for the benefit of the orphans of Michael M. S. Dutta and for the first time women were introduced as actresses. On Saturday last there were only two females who represented Devajani and Devika (Sharmistha's attendant). Their motions and speech were not quite easy and free. One Sagarika did well. Sukracharyya and Madhavya did well. Jajati was, no doubt, gorgeously dressed, but was clumsy in movements. Great praise is due to Babu Sarat Chandra Ghose, manager of the theatre and Babu Pyari Mohan Roy, Honorary Secretary for their noble exertions in the opening of the Theatre for the entertainment of the general public."

The *Englishman* of 18th August also had the following:--

"Theatricals are now the rage in Calcutta. A Bengali Theatrical Company has been formed... On last Saturday 16th, the theatre was opened... The Gallery is well arranged and decent. Michael M. S. Dutta's classical drama *Sarmistha* was selected for the first appearance. The actors performed their parts very creditably. The two women who were professional women were most successful—we wish the drama would have done without actresses."

Hindu Patriot of Aug. 18, 1873 also writes:-

"We wish this dramatic corps had done without the actresses. It is true that professional women join the jattras and natches but we had hoped managers of Bengali theatres would not bring themselves down to the level of the jattrawallas."

Amrita Bazar Patrika of 13th Bhadra, 1280 B. S., 28th Aug, 1873 writes,

“A New Theatre has been opened in Calcutta by the name of Bengal Theatre. *Sarmistha* was staged there for the last two Saturdays. The Theatrical Company has built a big house for performance and has made many excellent arrangements for the audience. They introduced two women on the stage in the parts of Devajani and Devika. Amongst the actors every one except Jajati acquitted himself well. When *Sarmistha* was written, there was really no drama in Bengali language at that time, which was not permeated by Sanskrit. That Bengali is no more.”

Bengal Theatre next staged on Aug. 30 *Maya Kanon*, the posthumous work of Madhusudan. Two facts are in dispute amongst our writers, and that need be settled, as the work itself and its performance are matters of national importance. These are (1) was *Maya Kanon* finished during the life-time of Madhusudan? Prof. Priyaranjan Sen in his “Western Influence in Bengali Literature” pp. 237-38 writes “the work was not finished when Madhusudan died in 1873 and the fragments were brought out under the name of *Maya Kanon*”.

Mr. Brajendra Nath Banerjee quotes a statement from Sarat Ghose, the proprietor, dated 1280 Poush that “*Maya Kanon*” was purchased during the author’s illness. Although Mr. Banerjee contradicts Professor Sen, the

quotation too does not settle the point. It runs thus :

“Before the writing was finished, we purchased the rights of both the dramas at proper price”. It is not clear from this if the poet finished the work after sale of the rights. The fact that *Maya Kanon* had been finished by the poet himself before his death, will however be clear from the declared statement of Babu Kailash Chandra Bose who was Madhusudan’s ‘Baboo’ and a constant companion and amanuensis of the dramatist during his illness. His statement appeared in “Somprakas” of Bhadra 31, 1281 B. S. Biographers and critics would have got sufficient light as to the last drama, had they come across the statement. Mr. Bose writes as follows :—“While Bengal Theatre was started, Sarat Babu introduced actresses only with Madhusudan’s advice and encouragement given by him. It was settled that he would write dramas for his Theatre.....

“While lying ill in bed, he commenced writing two dramas. Both these were being composed to serve the Bengal Theatre. The first was *Maya Kanon*, the second “*Beesh Ki Dhanurgun*”—the first was completed but the second “*Beesh Ki Dhanurgoon*”—remains incomplete...As in his illness the poet had no power to hold the pen, I used to sit by his bed and write *Maya Kanon*. What with excruciating pain for complications or even with constant

vomiting of blood, there was no rest for composing and finishing the drama."

The next question is what was the date when this drama was staged ?

Mr. Banerjee takes it to the next year, in April 1874. He must have been misled in not finding a paper with review or mention of performance about the drama earlier. Mr. Nagendra Nath Shome considers that Bengal Theatre took it up on the 17th. August 1873. There was no doubt that soon after *Sarmistha* was staged. *Maya Kanon*, (Enchanted Grove) was put on board. Natyacharyya Amrita Bose is very definite that "as *Maya Kanon* was not running well, we took *Kamya Kanon*—Grove desired for." The latter drama was staged on 31st Dec, 1873. From a consideration of all dates before us, we come to the conclusion that the first performance of *Maya Kanon* was held on the 30th Aug. 1873 and that it was repeated now and again.

Maya Kanon represents only the tragic life of the author, how in haunt of some thing enchanted, he killed himself. This was followed by *Mohanter Eki Kaj* on September 6, *Chaksudan* on Oct. 5, *Durgesh Nandini* on Oct. 20. 1873 in which Behari Babu played the part *Abhiram Swami*, *Sarat Ghose* as *Jagat Singh*, *Golap* as *Bemola*, *Nyadaru Girish* as *Vidyadigaj* and last but not the least *Haridas Baistab Osman* whose stature, movements and the

representation of the part were unique and have not been surpassed by any actor till today including even the master-artist Dani Babu.

The sales were not satisfactory at the beginning, but theatre began to get packed up houses from the time was put on board "Mohanta on the stage"—*Ish ! Mahantor Eki Kaj*, representing how *Elokeshi* a youthful lady of prepossessing beauty living at Haripal in the district of Hugly was coaxed, cajoled and seduced to become a concubine of Mohanta Madhav Giri through the assistance of the step-mother of the girl against her consent, how the girl made a clean breast of every thing to her husband Nabin, when he came to the house of the father-in-law and how the husband, not finding a Palki to carry his wife through the foul play of the Mohanta, exclaimed,—“This peerless beauty and youth of my darling to be tested by a monkey !” and hacked her to pieces with a fishing dao (Bati), how he immediately appeared before the police and made true and full disclosures of all the incidents, sticking to the confession before the Magistrate and how he was tried at the Hugly Sessions and sentenced to transportation for life * Babu Beharilal Chatterjee, both in appearance and representation in the role of the Mohanta, was full of life.

This was the most sensational play at that time, which drew crowds into the theatre as the

* Nabin was subsequently released from jail on mercy.

tale of the day was Mohanta and Elokeshi episode. History, however, repeated itself and more than half a century later, the affairs relating to the Mohanta also became the talk of the day, and the people not meekly submitting to the villainies of the head of a sacred place, and awakened to a sense of self-respect fought against the powers and riches of an unscrupulous Mohanta and at last forced him to come to his knees and submit to popular demands in September, 1924, and the leader of the struggle was no other person than the great and illustrious leader of the country, Desha-bandhu Chittaranjan Das, but the chapter after that was again a cloudy one for Bengal.

In the year 1874, *Kadambari* on Jan 10, *Erai Abar Bangali* on Jan 29, *Vidyasundar* of Maharaj Jatindra Mohan Tagore, *Malati-Mudhav* on 21st May, *Navanatak* on 6th June, *Padmavati* on 4th July, *Puru-vikram* on 22nd August, with Sarat Ghose as Puru, Haridas as Alexander and Golap-sundari as Rani Ail balla, *Ajmer Kumari* on 18th September and *Banger Parajay* on 14th Nov, were played. In this way the Bengal Theatre won the praise of all in their attempts to entertain the public and was able to secure patronage of big persons through the untiring exertion of Sarat Babu and Beharilal.*

* Maharaja of Burdwan at whose palace at Kalna Bengal Theatre showed some performance, allowed his name to be connected with it as patron, vide Indian Daily News Dec. 15-1874.

In the year 1875 there was some change in the management. Towards the beginning of the year, Babu Nagendra Nath Banerjee, Kiran Ch. Banerjee and Amrita Lal Bose and a few actors from the Great National Opera Company joined the Bengal Theatre and performed *Sati Ki Kalankini* on the 6th February * under the name of Great National Opera and Bengal Theatre Companies. *Kapal Kundala* was staged on Feb 13, *Meghnadbadh* in March, with Kiron Babu as Meghnad & Haridas as Laksman as also other pieces. But some time before when *Malhar Rao Gaekwer* was staged on the 22nd May, Amrita Lal Bose left for Great National again. Nagendra Babu then formed an independent group under the name of New Aryan Theatre and with the help of Babu Upendra Nath Das staged his drama *Surendra-Vinodini Natak* with Nagendra Banerjee as Surendra, Bono-biharini as Binodini, Sukumari as Birajmohini and Haridas Das as Magistrate. After *Beernari* was staged on Sept. 4, *Banga Bijeta* by Mr. R. C. Dutt on Sept 11, and *Battle of Plassy* by Nabin Ch. Sen on Sept 25, 1875, followed. † Upendra Babu next joined the Great National and we should take our readers there. Sukumari also followed him.

* *Englishman*, 6th February, 1875. This had been played in Great National in 1874

† *A. B. Patrika*, 19th August, 1875 and *Englishman* 17th August, 1875.

Chapter X

The Great National Theatre

The other important public theatre was the *Great National Theatre* which opened on the 31st December, 1873, at 6, Beadon Street Calcutta with *Kamya Kanon* and was associated with the name of Babu Bhuvan Mohan Neogy to whom all credit of having the permanent stage of the *National Theatre* must go and who was protector of it for a number of years. It was built of wood after the pattern of *Lewis Theatre* at Chowringhee under the supervision of Babu Dharmadas Sur, proprietor Babu Bhuvan Mohan having spent Rs. 13000/- for the purpose. It is said that Bhuvan Babu, his relation Dharmadas and Babu Nagendra Nath Banerjee went to the *Bengal Theatre* to see a performance of "Mohanta on the Stage" and were very much disappointed when they

were not allowed to see the Manager after they had failed to get tickets at any price, the rush on the night being very great. Bhuvan Mohon, a youth of generous but lavish habits had just inherited large property and had, as we have seen before, a great taste for theatre. The result of the misunderstanding was the establishment of the *Great National Theatre* with Dharmadas Sur as Manager on a site which still adorns a flourishing Stage under the name of the *Minerva Theatre*. The land belonged to one Mahendra Das and a lease of it was taken for 5 years by Dharmadas at a monthly rent of Rs. 40- in Bhubon Neogi's name. The possession of the land was taken on 29th September, 1873, and scenes were painted by Dharmadas with the help of Mr. D. Garriek. *

The foundation stone was also laid in Sept. 29, 1873, under the presidency of Babu Navogopal Mitra. †

Kamyakanan ‡ was taken from a fairy tale, and was run on a competition with Bengal's *Mayakanan*, which did not meet with much acclamation. The welcome song was sung

* Dharmadas's Autobiography.

† *Englishman* 3rd Oct., 1873.

‡ Amrita Babu says—it was composed by the joint exertion of himself, Nagendra Babu, his brother Devendra Babu and another Devendra, a Medical College student. *Vide* also his *reminiscences*,

by 50 voices in a chorus and a farce *Young Bengal* was also in the bill, but the opening night was marked by a mishap which forbode its future fate. It was very curious that when the hero of the play Babu Amritlal Bose was worshipping the Goddess Kali before the sacrificial fire on the stage, people all round cried out 'fire, fire', the wings having caught it elsewhere. There was a great commotion amongst the audience, who began to find out the easiest means of escape. The accident was due to the fact that no chimney was set in on the gas-box by the side of the window and owing to high pressure fire broke out. The loss, however, was not much, slight repairs having restored the whole thing. There was, however, no further repetition of this drama, as it was considered inauspicious.

The spectators made a great clamour for the return of money, but were pacified with great difficulty by Ardhendu Babu who was present here not as an actor but as a sympathiser.

Babu Nagendra Banerjee was the Secretary of the above Great National and Dharmadas Sur the Manager,

On the 1st January, 1874, there was a performance of *Niladarpana*, held at the Fancy Fair, of Belvedere as the Bengal Theatre, with actress in female roles was not considered with favour there. On the 10th Jan. *Vidhaba-vivaha Natak* was played and *Pranaya-Pariksa*

was played on the 17th Jan when the scenic grandeur was really marvellous. *Krishna Kumari* was next staged on January 24, and Laksmi Narain Chakraborty's *Nandbanshochhed* on the 31st January 1874.

On the 3rd January, 1874, The Old National Theatre* also played *Niladarpana* and 'Ami to Unmadini—I am a mad woman'—to conclude *Mohanta in penitent state* and the most successful scenes of "Bharat-Mata" and "Cymbeline" (Kusum Kumari) on the 17th January, Monomohan Base's *Pranaya-Pariksa*, and last *Hemlata Natak* by Haralal Ray on the 24th January. These performances, though enacted in a rickety and shabby stage and not fetching much money, were really wonderful as the famous *Amrita Bazar Patrika* of 15th January, 1874 (3rd Magh, 1280, B. S.) speaks of both the National and Great National :

"The Great National has got its own theatre-building and stage, and scenes are very nice. The National has no house and its scenes are shabby and require a change. The Orchestra of Great National consists in the English Band but all the same is not sweet. The Orchestra of the National is sweet and one would like it to continue, and above all, the actors of the National are so well trained that they can not be matched with those of the Great National."

* On Dec 7, 1873, the first anniversary was held at Sanyal's house under the presidency of Babu Monomohon Bose.

Thus, while Great National, inspite of its house and scenes, could not make much impression on the audience, and while Bengal's *Durges-nandini*, with Sarat Chandra Ghose, an expert rider on horseback, was drawing crowded houses, Girish Chandra Ghosh's help was considered indispensably necessary and he too ungrudgingly rendered his services. On the 24th January, *Krisnakumari Natak* was staged and *Kapalkundala* was next staged with great success. Girish then dramatised the well-known novel of Mr. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, *Mrinalini* which kept up the imagination of the spectators for some time. Girish also coached the parts and appeared in the leading role. All artists of both "National" and "Great National" gathered at the Great National Stage under the leadership of Girish and enacted a performance, which has ever remained incomparable. *Mrinalini* was staged on the 14th Feb, 1874, and the cast was as follows :

Pashupati	...	Girish Chandra Ghosh.
Hrisikesh	...	Ardhendu Sekhar Mustafi
Hem Chandra	...	Nagendra Nath Banerjee.
Digvijay	...	Amritalal Bose.
Byomkesh	...	Amritalal Mukherjee (Bel Babu)
Baktier Khiliji	...	Mahendralal Bose.
Janardan	...	Radha Prasad Basak.

* Some say *Mrinalini* was staged at National on Feb 14, and at Great National on 21st Feb 1874. This is not the fact. Actors of both the theatres united and staged on Feb 14, 1874 at the Great National Stage.

Girijaya	...	Ashutosh Banerjee
Monorama	...	Kshetra Mohan Ganguli.
Mrinalini	...	Basanta Kumar Ghosh.

Here Girish surpassed his Neemchand, Wood and Bheem Singh and showed talents of a very high order. Babu Amrita Lal Bose said, at Kantalpara in 1917, during the first Bankim Sammilani, "Girish's voice was so powerful, distinct and sonorous and his acting so masterly that for this part alone, an artist would have been honoured with titles in other countries." He says also in his reminiscences, "Girish's artistic movements in the last scene, while he embraced Astabhujā in the flames, produced a thrilling sensation even on us, what to speak of the spectators!" What an expression displayed in his face when he for the first time got Monorama's acquaintanoe in her words that she was Keshav's daughter—his own married wife! Ardhendu also joined Great National for the first time as Hrisikesh and all actors did well, but special mention might be made of Monorama of whom the advertisement used to run as "Look—Look to your Monorama, she jumps at the fire!"

As a dramatist also there was indication of Girish's genius when on the last scene Pasupati was frantic for Monorama, saying, "Leave me, leave, Monorama is in the room, she must be saved". This was Girish's invention.

Bazar Larai was also staged on Feb, by the combined parties.

Kapalakundala was again staged under Girish's direction on the 4th April, 1874. Babu Amrita Lal Bose said :

"Nagen Babu was both a handsome person and a good actor. He rendered the part of Navakumar with great credit. Matilal's Kapalik was superb. None has been able to surpass him upto now in his Torap and Kapalik. Bel Babu and Kshetra Babu did marvellous, the former as Mati Bibi. and the latter as Kapalakundala. These two used to monopolise the main female characters- Bel Babu was without a rival in emotional and Kshetra Babu in mild female characters."

Kamalini (or Daughter of a Kulin) by Laksmi narain was staged on the 30th May, 1874, when the theatre remained in abeyance for some time, travelling in Mofussil,* once or twice, after which we come to the period of great transition on the stage.

In spite of the marvellous acting by Girish and his colleagues, the Great National laboured under serious disadvantages in acting without female actresses and Bengal Theatre therefore began to command a greater sale. *Durgenandini* was played here in competition with its rival, but besides female actresses, Babu Sarat Ghosh's "Jagat Sinha" at *The Bengal* was a treat. His princely figure and his dexterity as a rider on the stage made the performance more attractive. Then again when *Mrinalini* was

* *Sadharani*, 5th July, 1874.

staged at the Bengal Theatre also (the manuscripts according to some being supplied by Babu Kiran Chandra Banerjee, who appeared as Pashupati), the songs of Golapsundari (afterwards Sukumari Dutt) used to produce a thrill to the audience. The Great National began, thus, to fall down in competition. Dharmadas could not meet the situation ; so in his place Nagendra Babu was appointed the Manager, with his brother Devendra Nath Banerjee as Director. The absence of female actresses being thus keenly felt, the Great National in Devendra Nath's Opera *Sati ki alankini* or *Is She chaste or not** staged on Sept., 19th, 1874, introduced the following actresses—Rajkumari, Kshetramani, Jadumani, Luxmimani, Narayani and Harimati. After this Girish ceased coming to the theatre for some time, as taking of women of the town was not to his liking at first.

Our readers will excuse us for making some references here about these actresses. Rajkumari as a heroine was successful, but of Kshetramani it may be said that none equalled her in histrionic arts. On a later occasion His Excellency Lord Dufferin, the Viceroy of India and Sir Rivers Thompson, the Lieutenant Governor on seeing her play the part of Jhee (maid servant) in the farce of *Vivahabibhrat* of Amritalal, congratulated her on the success she achieved, remarking, very few actresses could

* *A. B. Patrika*, 17th and 24th Sept., 1874.

equal her in acting even in England. In comic parts she was in all respects a match to Ardhendu Sekhar and the two together could reproduce Pantomimes admirably, sometimes on prompting and sometimes without it and in tragic parts she surpassed other colleagues. For her, to represent best art, one pose or expression was quite enough. As an orphan poor girl leading an old beggar in *Sarat-Sorojini*, finding no juice in a piece of dried sugarcane and expressing disgust on the occasion thereby, used to be shown by one pose or look only.

Sometimes after, Kadambini also joined this theatre and was set up for leading parts. But the next two actresses who soon joined the Great National, Sukumari from Bengal, and Binodini just fresh from home were historically important. Both rose to the top of the profession and Binodini was once considered to be the *Prima donna* of the Bengali Stage.

Sati ki Kalankini with Raja in the role of Radhika was much appreciated and was soon followed by other performances, which have become matters of history now. We shall relate those in the next chapter.

About its success, Girish says :

Great National won much reputation by staging *Sati ki Kalankini* under the direction of Madan Mohan Burman.*

* Girish's preface to Binodini's autobiography.

Indeed, Bhuvan Neogi, the proprietor spared no pains or money to make the play a success, but the introduction of women was not agreeable to Dharmadas and Ardhendu, who went out under the leadership of Matilal Sur and showed some performances at Dacca, Berhampore, Krishnanagore, Ranaghat, Birbhum and Bogra under the name "National", but as Ardhendu's mother was in death-bed, he was helped by Bhuvan Mohon and was not allowed any more to go outside.* He too joined the theatre with women.

Next, *Puruvikram* staged on Oct. 3, 1874 with Nagendra Babu as Puru, Mahendra Bose as Alexander and Kshetramani in the difficult role of Rani Oilabila † spread reputation far and wide but we reserve our comment for the next chapter and other performances do not deserve mention except *Rudrapal*, which was a translation of Macbeth, and on the first night (31st Oct, 1874), Colonel Hyde was present and the advertisement ran as "Macbeth, with an original music from Lockes."

From monetary considerations, however, these two dramas could not interest the proprietor much and the spectators also wanted another opera like *Sati ki alankini*. *Ananda Kanan* by Lakshmi Narayan Chakravarty.

* *Rangabhumi* 23rd March, 1901, Ardhendu's reminiscences. On that night of *Puruvikram*, Bengal played *Durgesnandini* and *Opera Troubles*.

was thus brought on the stage on 14th and 21st Nov., * 1874 and fetched some money. A review by *Englishman* of this opera gives a bit of contemporary history.

"The Great National Theatre—The opera *Ananda Kanan* (The Bower of Bliss) or *Madaner Digvijaya* was performed at the National Theatre for the second time on Saturday last before a good, though not a crowded house. The performance was fairly done, the actors and actresses acquitting themselves creditably. Among them the following deserve special mention—Rati and Santi represented by Jadumani, Kavita and Kamala by Raj Kumari, Ahmika by Khatoo, Chapalata by Haridashi, Lila by Kadu, Sangit by Hari Charan Banerjee, Madan by Suresh Mitter, Basanta by Nagendra Nath Banerjee, Aviveka by Ardhendu Mustafi and Narayan by Amrita Lal Bose."

Both *Sati ki Kalankini* and *Ananda Kanan* fetching good money, Nagen Babu considered that success was due to him and insisted on an agreement being drawn by the proprietor to the effect that in case the latter dismissed him, an indemnity of Rs. 20000- would have to be paid. Bhuvan Babu refusing the proposal, Nagendra Nath left the theatre along with his brother Kiran Chandra Banerjee, Babu Amrita Lal Bose, Madan Mohan Burman, Jadumani and Kada-mbini.*

* *Englishman*, 24th Nov., 1873.

As we described in page 227, they afterwards joined the Bengal Theatre.

Great National experienced a bitter time with this change and we can not enlighten our readers about internal troubles in a better way than, quoting what appeared in the *Indian Daily News* of 2nd Dec., 1874 :

“ A correspondent mentions that a warrent has been issued against one prominent character connected with it, for his apprehension on a charge of criminal misappropriation, the amount of defalcation is stated to be Rs. 10000/-, which is probably an exaggeration as is also the statement that a young native gentleman has been induced to incur debts, in connection with the theatre, to the extent of Rs. 50000/-.”

There was defalcation by those in charge and there was also really a suit and a very prominent notary of the town (afterwards a title-holder) was indicted for perjury (making false statements about Bhuvan Mohan).

Satrusanhar was staged on 12th Dec., and *Vanger Sukhavasana*, on 26th Dec., 1874.

Dharmadas was next taken in as the manager, who now formed a strong corps with Mahendra Lal, Matilal, Bel Babu, Kshetramani and Golap Sundari, from January 1875.

Sometime later, Amritalal Bose, Madan Mohan Burman and Kadambini also returned as stated before, to the Great National.

Dharmadas got the right of staging a new drama *Saratsarojini* from the pen of Babu Upendra Nath Das, although known as written by one Durgadas Babu. It was staged at the Great National on 2nd Jan., 1875, under the distinguished presence and patronage of H.H. the Maharaja Harendra Krishna Singh of Bettia. The house was crowded to suffocation and on the 2nd night a large number of intending visitors had to go disappointed for want of accommodation and the parts were very well rendered. It was unanimously pronounced to be one of the most original and powerful productions of the age. Shooting on the stage was shown for the first time. *

In a later issue, the *Englishman* praised highly Mahendra Babu (representing Sarat Kumar), Kiran Chandrā Banerjee, Jagattarini and Kshetramani and specially the songster Jadumani.†

After having played one or two stage shows, the Great National, with the assistance of Babu Girish Chandra Das, an officer of the Calcutta Currency, then on special deputation, went to

* On the 9th Jan. 1875, at the Lewts Theatre as Royal under the name "Great National Opera Company," Nagendra Babu did marvellously as the drunkard in *Kincit Jalayoga* and Jadumani as Radhika in *Sati ki Kalankini*. Maharaja of Jodhpore was present. *Englishman*, 12th Jan, 1875. and *A. B. Patrika*, 14th Jan 1874.

† *Englishman*, 17th Aug., 1875.

Delhi in March, 1875. The party stayed at Delhi for about 10 days, then went to Lahore, stayed for about a month and created an impression there. It then came to Meerut, to Agra, Brindavan and the whole party then came to Lucknow.*

A portion of the company showed performances at 'Home' also, under Mahendra Bose, as manager.

The return of Dharmadas's party in May 1875, after a successful tour was noticed in the pages of the *Englishman* (15th May) as follows :

"The portion of the company, lately giving so many successful performances in Delhi, Lahore etc., so favourably noticed in the papers having just returned to Calcutta, the performances henceforth will be on grand scale. The orchestra under the direction of Madan Mohan Burman is a charming one."

Hirak Churna Natak by Babu Amritalal Bose was staged on 17th June with Ardhendu Sekhar as Gaekoer, Laksmi as Laksmibai, Jagattarini as Kumar, and Amrita Bose as Mr. Scobble, Advocate General.

On 3rd July, 1875, *Padmini* by Mahendra Basu was staged for his benefit, Mahendra Babu himself appearing in the role of Bheem Sinha. The well known "Bharat Sangit" song was sung

* *Indian Mirror*, 7th April, 1875.

by Jadumani. Gopal Chandra Mazumdar appeared as Alauddin.

After this, for about 4 or 5 months the theatre remained in the hands of Babu Krishnadhan Banerjee of Shyampukur as lessee, with Babu Mahendra Lal Bose as his manager. The reason of this change was that Bhuvan Babu by the long absence of the company not only lost at home but also did not get anything from abroad though the Manager was said to have made profits and in disgust he leased his theatre to a third party.* which staged Padmini etc.

After some performances, it was seen that Krishnadhan was in debt and unable to pay rent. Bhuvan Babu, therefore, took the theatre back into his hands and made Babus Upendra Nath Das and Amrita Lal Bose as Director and Manager, respectively. They opened from Nov. 6. 1875.

But the inauspicious star in the fortunes of Bhuvan Mohan was in ascendancy and we shall describe that in the next chapter.

* *Englishman*, 7th August, 1875.

Chapter XI

THE DRAMATIC PERFORMANCES ACT

[*The circumstances that led to the passing of it*]

For some time and with greater zeal since Mr. Upendra Nath Das and Babu Amrita Lal Basu took up the management, the Great National Theatre began to stage dramas of sensational interest and acquired a notoriety. Incidents succeeded in quick succession and the authorities found themselves difficult to cope with the situation. Legislation followed and the Dramatic Performances Act restricting the free and fair growth *of the stage* was soon passed. The Act is still in force and it hangs like a veritable sword of Damocles even today on the Bengali Stage. The history of this period is a very memorable one, and we propose to narrate the causes *seriatim*.

I. NATIONAL DRAMAS

The first tragedy chosen for the National Theatre was, as we have seen, *Niladarpana Natak*. It was repeated in the Great National Theatre also. It was really a drama of the national interest. It touched every Bengali

heart. It stirred up the audience both Indians and Europeans alike, and sometimes they were beside themselves with emotion. The Great National Theatre went to different places in 1875 with Dharmadas Babu as manager. It gave its performances at Agra, Delhi, Mathura, Brindavan, Lucknow, and everywhere the scenes of oppression by Messrs. Wood and Rogue upon the innocent ryots created great sensation amongst the audience. When they appeared in those places on the stage in their respective roles, Babu Nilmadhav Chakravarty as Golak Bose, Babu Ardhendu Shekhar as Mr. Wood, Babu Matilal Sur as Torap, Babu Avinash Chandra Kar, Assistant Manager stet as Mr. Rogue, Kshetramani as Savitri, Kadambini as Sairindhri, Binodini as Saralata, Lakshmi as Kshetramoni and Narayani as Padimayrani, everydody was pleased as to the manner in which they acquitted themselves in their allotted parts. But the trouble arose during a performance at Lucknow, when Mr. Rogue fell upon Kshetramani, big with child and the poor girl piteously begged to be released, crying in utter helpless manner and saying, "Shaheb, (Saheb Tumi Āmār Bābā), I am your daughter, leave me, thou art my father," but Rogue dragged her by force brutally taunting at her last remarks saying, "I wish to be the father of your child" ("Tomār Chhelel Bābā haite ichchhā hoeache"). At that time

Torap entered the room in company with Navin Madhab by breaking open the widow panes and while Navin raised Kshetramani in his arms and departed and Torap slapped and kicked Mr. Rogue, the European audience was so much excited that some of them actually ran towards the stage to fall upon Matilal Sur, who appeared in the role of Torap. They were, at last, pacified with great difficulty. The District Magistrate ordered the performance at once to be stopped, advised the party to start for Calcutta, and with police help made them leave the station peacefully, with their bags and baggages.*

That was the stir, *Nildarpana* created amongst the audience ; yet strictly speaking it was not a national drama in the sense it had no political goal to achieve, nor any political propaganda to make, but it laid before the public the heartless oppression of the indigo planters upon the helpless ryots, so that therein might be a speedy end to all such cruelties.

The object was no doubt laudable and noble but as we have shown in page 98, in no way it could be called seditious, nor was it an attempt for the political uplift of the masses. The first national dramatic piece in the aforesaid sense was, therefore, "Bhart-matar Bilap", or the Lamentations of Mother India, staged on the

* *Reminiscences* of Binodini Dasi.

15th February, 1873 at the Hindu Mela (Fair) under the auspices of the National Theatre. It represented Mother India, pale and morose at the miseries, poverty and degradation of her sons—dull, pathetic and quite reluctant to make any effort whatsoever. The famous song of Satyendra Nath Tagore “Malina Mukha-chandramā Bhārata Tomāri” (“O India, thy moonlike face is dark with sorrow”), used to move the audience to tears. This piece was written at the suggestion of Babu Sishir Kumar Ghosh, the famous founder and editor of the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, although publisher’s name only was given as Kiran Chandra Banerjee.* We now give below the summary of the piece played on the occasion:

“There the mother sits, dark and solemn with grief ‘like the moon over-cast with clouds of sorrow; and resting her cheek on her left palm:

Her hair is dishevelled and coarse ;

She is clad in rags.

And iron bracelets she wears on her wrists ;

There she stands lost in thoughts

Like the sad Meditation’s self,

Her children like skeletons covered in skin

Alas ! sleep by her lying prostrate on dust.

Suddenly, alighting aloft the sky,

& the goddess of Destiny appeared ;

* *A. B. Patrika*. 10th Falgun, 1279, B. S.

Her graceful feet planted on a full blown lotus.
 But, lo ! she burst into tears, crying,
 "Alas ! Seeing thy sorrowful face, O, Bharata,
 Tears gush through my eyes both day and night.
 My heart breaks seeing thee,
 Thus plunged into an ocean of grief".
 Hearing that sweet voice She looked up ;
 But being blind with tears,
 She could not read her fate.
 The divine lady brokeforth again,
 "O Bharata ! Look to your children hungry
 and lean.
 All are buried in death-like sleep,
 The sight is quite painful to see ;
 So I retire from thy place".

After some time her stupor broke :
 She tried to rouse her sons from sleep,
 But from lethargy they wanted not to rise.
 Seeing that the Mother burst into tears,
 When at last their sleep was broken
 They were sore pressed with hunger and thirst;
 They asked for food.
 "Where will you get it now ?"
 Replied Mother with a sigh :
 "Fortune has left you for good"
 And now She is in the queen's palace
 Standing by the sea."

"God save the queen,
 May victory attend on her,
 May she give shelter to all."

Thus they sang.

Then a white man red with rage,
 Cried out, "Rebellion rank !"
 And kicked at the children of the soil.
 Mother knelt and wept,
 She cursed her lamentable fate,
 And wept her appeals to God.

The *Amrita Bazar Patrika** published the full play in Bengali and stated that when this piece was performed at the Hindu Mela on the 15th Feb., 1873, the whole audience numbering about 1500 persons shed tears and their hairs stood on their end.

It was, as *Bangadarshan* (of Kartic, 1280 B.S.) stated, "a Burlesque or allegory. Mother India, the presiding deity of fortune, some Indians and two Europeans, Patience and Courage were its characters. It was a tolerably good production."

In the year 1875, *Puru-vikram*,† *Bharate Yavan* and *Banger Sukhavasana* were staged at the Great National Theatre on the 3rd October, 7th November and 26th December, respectively. These plays appealed to the patriotic feelings of the Bengalis;—*Bharate Yavan* related the historic resistance of Prithviraj against the

* 10th Falgun, 1279 B. S.

† *Puru-vikram* was produced very successfully at the G. N. Theatre, both actors and actresses playing their respective parts well. *Englishman*, 6th October, 1875.

Moslem invaders; *Banger Sukhavasana* was based upon Baktiar Khilji's conquest of Bengal and *Puru-Vikram* from the pen of Jyotirindra Nath Tagore described the heroic deeds of that heroic king Porus, who bravely fought against Alexander the Great, Emperor of Greece. Mahendra Lal Bose acted the part of Alexander the Great, Nagendra Nath Banerjee that of Porus and Srimati Kshetramani Devi that of Ailobila, the queen. There was a song in that drama that vibrated the patriotic cords of the Bengali audience, and we give below a summary of that in our English :

Let the children of Bhārata in one voice declare
Which land is like her ?

What hill is like the Himalayas ?

Which land is so rich with

Such streams and mines of gems ?*

Let us sing of her glory,

May victory ever attend on her.

There is nothing to fear,

Let us sing of her victory for ever.

Where the woman is so chaste and fair

Like Sita, Savitri, Sarmistha and Damayanti ?

Let us sing of her victory.

Have you forgotten the heroes

*In this vein the famous song of D. L. Roy in his
Shajahan ran:

"In this world of ours, full of wealth, bliss and corn,
will you get a land like this?"

Bhishma, Drona, Bhima and Arjuna the
brave ?

Why do you fear the enemy ?

Virtue always treads in virtue's path,
Division has made you weak,
But united will grow strong.

'Thus sing of victory to Bhārata,
Her countenance will again be bright.

Similarly in Scene I, Act III when king
Porus was urging his men to fight against the
Greeks reminding every one of his duty
towards the father-land, we find greater
inspiration:

"Awake, Arise!

Look, the cruel Yavanas
Trespass into your home;
Be of one mind,
Liberate the Mother-land.

Delay is intolerable,
Advance with the banner of victory in your hand.

What is life without freedom ?

Fie on him who wants to live
Being robbed of his liberty !

It is better to die,

But let Liberty and Honour live in the land.
Come and swear,

Either must win or must die.

Either kill the Yavanas

Or follow death yourself."

Then followed in quick succession other
'National' dramas at the Great National
Theatre. in 1875.

Of them the following deserve special notice, *Hirak-churna Natak*, *Sarojini Natak* and the *Surendra-vinodini Natak*. Similar other dramas like the *Malhar Rao*, *Virnari*, the *Ajmer Kumari* and *Banger Parajaya* were also staged at the Bengal Theatre.

Hirak-churna was written by Sj. Amritlal Bose, and was staged on the 17th June, 1875. It represented the farcical 'trial' of Malhar Rao Gaekwar of Baroda, who was forced to abdicate on the 29th April, 1875, for having attempted to poison Col. R. Phayre, British Political Agent in the Baroda Court.

The *Amrita Bazar Patrika* commenting upon the play observed that despite its many good merits, its effect was marred by its undignified attacks hurled against Babu Kristo Das Paul, the Editor of the *Hindu Patriot*, who supported the "Trial."

Hirak-churna was followed by Jyotirindra Nath Tagore's *Sarojini Natak*, staged on Dec. 26, 1875. It was a famous production of its time and its songs and sentiments became the literary possession of the day.

It narrated the story of the historic fight of Rana Lakshman Singh of Chitore against Alauddin Khiliji—the Pathan ruler of Delhi. There was a song in the drama by the Rajput women dressed in red-bordered saris and adorned with floral wreaths about to fling themselves on the blazing pyre to burn to death

and save themselves from the polluted touch of the Mahomedan victors. The song used to kindle patriotic fervour in the heart of every Bengali spectator. The famous song ran thus:

Jval, jval chita dvgun dvgun
 Paran sapive vidhava vala,
 Jvaluk, jvaluk chitar agun
 Judavi ekhani praner jvala.
 Dekh re yavan dekh re tora,
 Ye jvalay hridaya jvalali sabe,
 Saksi rahiven devata tar
 Er pratiphal bhugite habe

In English the song reads thus :

Blaze up ye funeral pyre, blaze up in double
 the glare,
 The widowed woman will cast her life.
 Let the flame of the funeral pyre burn and leap,
 It will soon extinguish the burning of heart.
 Look, ye Yavanas, look, but here, what fire
 have you enkindled in our bosoms,
 Gods will bear witness to this,
 And soon you will reap the fruit of your
 deeds.

There was also another scene in the drama, which greatly excited the audience, who even seemed to forget themselves in great excitement. This was when *Sarojini* (the heroine) was brought before a sacrificial post (to which animals for sacrifice are tied down) and Rana consented to her being sacrificed for the deliverance of the country. Ranadhir was loo-

king sharp and Bhairavacharyya, the disguised spy from the court of the Emperor Alauddin approached her with sword in his hand. Then all on a sudden, Bijay Singh rushed into the scene crying, "All's conspiracy, Bhairav is not a brahmin, but a Mahomedan spy from Delhi." At this, many of the spectators, out of emotion, jumped upon the stage to save Sarojini's life and some even fainted. The famous actress Binodini told us that occasionally some of them had to be nursed by the theatrical staff till they regained their consciousness.*

The Englishman also writes on June 25, 1876.

"The performance for the second time of the drama "Sarojini" on Saturday last (22nd June) at the G. N. T. was a success on the whole. Nearly all the actors and actresses did their parts with credit."

As soon as Babu Upendra Nath Das became the director of the Great National, he began to revive the martial darmas of Jyotirindra Nath.

The third play *Surendra-vinodini* has become quite a history, for the trouble it put its authors into; but of this, later on.

Now, these dramas produced a tremendous effect on the minds of the people, and naturally attention of the Government was drawn towards them.

*Mati Sur appeared in the role of Lakshman Singh, Gopal Das as Bhairavacharyya, Amrita Bose as Bijay Singh, Mahendra Bose as Ranadhir Singh and Binodini as Sarojini.

The hon'ble Mr. Hobbhouse, the law member of the Viceroy's Legislative Council, wanted special powers of the Executive quoting history, that in time of excitement there was no surer method of directing public feeling against individuals or classes or the Government itself, than by exhibiting them on the stage in an odious light and the best remedy was, therefore, to suppress such dramas.

No doubt, Mr. Hobbhouse, while presenting the Bill in the Supreme Legislative Council, presided over by His Excellency the Viceroy, on the 14th March 1876, did not mention about these dramas in particular, but put clearly before the house, the following:

"Now it had been found in all times and in all countries that no greater stimulus could be supplied to excite the passion of mankind than that supplied by means of the drama and that no feat was too difficult for a dramatist, who could produce any effect he pleased on the minds of the spectators:

Sequius irritant animos demissa per aures
Suam que sunt oculis subjecta fidelibus.*"

II. ARRIVAL OF THE PRINCE OF WALES.

Though the staging of the national dramas was not sought as an apology for passing the Dramatic Performances Act, the incidents relating to the Prince's visit in the house of a Bhowanipore gentleman were, however, so made.

**Englishman*, 15th March, 1876.

It was about this time that his Royal Highness the Prince Of Wales (afterwards, King-Emperor Edward VII, grandfather of our King Emperor Edward VIII and George VI) visited Calcutta on December 23, 1875.* Amongst his famous hosts, Babu Jagadananda Mukherjee, a famous wakil of the Calcutta High Court, and a member of the Bengal Legislative Council, entertained the Prince in his residential house at Bakulbagan, Bhowanipore, on the 3rd January, 1876. (20th Paush, 1282 B. S.). The Prince was loyally received by the ladies of his zenana and presented with an emerald necklace, one pair of gold bangles, one gold neck chain and some pair of Dacca embroidery muslins.† Lord Northbrooke, the then viceroy is said to have protested at the Prince's reception, at a Hindu zenana and his resignation was rumoured.‡ Mrs. Jagadananda Mukherjee, with her retinue and neighbouring friends, was all attention to the Prince, received

* The Prince arrived near Diamond Harbour on the 22nd December, 1875, on board the steamer Serapin and arrived at the Prinseps Ghat on 23rd December, at 4-30 P. M. (Contemporaneous newspapers.)

† Diary of Jagadananda Mukherjee, Published in page 54 of "Nandavansa" by Chandra Sekhar Mukherjee.

‡ It is said that the Prince went to the Zenana, leaving the ladies that accompanied him, behind, and His Excellency, as a mark of displeasure, wanted to tender resignation. *A. B. Patrika*, 7th Magh, 1282 B. S.

him with conchshells, and offered *varan* with the joyous shouts *ulu*, peculiar to Hindu females on festive occasions. The prince seemed to have been astonished at the jewellery and ornaments, which Mrs. Mukherjee and her companions put on their persons and is said to have exclaimed, while parting, to Jagadananda Babu :

“I see no difference between your house and my Windsor Palace.”

An account of the visit of the prince, though a digression, we give here below from an account of the prince's private secretary:

3rd January, 1876.

How it came about I do not exactly know but it is probably that the prince expressed a wish to see the Zenana of some respected native and that the wish was made to the worthy Hindu of Bhowanipore. Mr. Mukherjee was too happy to gratify it to-day. Miss Baring, Lady Temple, to-day Miss Milmen, Lady Stuart Hogg and other had perhaps some part in this pourparler. There were hundreds of children assembled to see the prince arrive; most of the little ladies held pretty bouquets, with which, out of local devotion, to pelt the prince. These children may develop into Hindu Blooms and establish Women's Right Associations unless their wild shrieks of liberty were silenced into the leaden flood of caste and custom, which has drowned so much thought and life in India century after century. Instead of salutes and flourishes or bell peeling the Hindus use conches to

announce the arrival of guests; the noise of these natural horns makes one rejoice that he is not among the Britons. These were sounded often and long for there were false alarms of the prince coming but at last his carriage came in sight and there was conch-blowing. His Royal Highness did not appear in the splendid attire, which Mrs. Mukherjee and her fair friend, no doubt, thought a prince should wear. Whether Babu Jagadananda Mukherjee will ever get over the wrath of his co-religionists for the doings of this day, time only can show. There is one fact revealed by the manner in which the occurrence was accepted by those concerned. Hindu ladies at all events do not consider strict seclusion all essential to their happiness. But it is dangerous to argue from a particular to the universal and so it will be safer perhaps to say that some Hindu ladies do not dislike being seen at all events by a Prince of Wales.*

This incident, however, innocent was severely commented upon and raised a storm of protest throughout the length and breadth of the country and the press and the stage equally joined in expressing severe condemnation of Jagadananda Babu's action. The *Hindu Patriot* regretted "that the national feeling had been outraged at the price the Babu paid for his

*Travels of the Prince—by W. H. Russel, honorary private secretary to H. R. H. Prince of Wales and member of the prince's suite accompanying him to India—Published in 1877, page 378—379.

honour." *The Patrika* was rather more outspoken ; on the 23rd Paush, 1282 B. S., it wrote, "The Hindu society can bear all oppression, but no shock to its womanhood. Any person, who allows the family to be defiled from outside, is a disgrace, nay a great enemy, to the Hindu."

Indeed this action of his, received the strongest censure from the society. Satirical songs poured forth from all quarters and the Great National Theatre, at the earliest opportunity, took up the matter, prepared and staged a farce *Gajananda* on the 19th February, 1876, written by Upendra Babu, along with the performance of "*Sarojini Natak*". The prologue and the songs now without trace, were all the composition of Girish Chandra Ghose. The song that was put into the mouth of the ladies, while moving round the prince, ran thus:

"Can't knock about any more
My feet are aching ;
Why do you fall on my person ?
Just move a little slowly
I can't walk with pitcher in my hand
Just wait a moment.
I am wet with perspiration."
"Olo dhire chalo"

This was followed by a quoted poem "*Vajimat*" of the well known poet Hem Chandra Banerjee satirising his brother-pleader as "Long live, thou son of a Mukherjee."

The Government of Bengal seemed to be highly offended with the above representation on the stage and tried to prevent its repetition. On the 23rd February, 1876, (Wednesday) at the benefit night of Babu Amrita Lal Bose when performance of *Sati Ki Kalankini* and a musical concert were arranged, *Gajadananda* too was brought on the stage under a new name and in a somewhat different garb.*

The police were present on this occasion also. Then on the 26th February, "new and able work" *Karnat-kumar* (The Prince of *Karnat*) was put on boards to conclude with the above farce again under a new name *Hanuman-charitra* (Monkey's charactor), when Mr. Das, the Director, was to have delivered a stirring speech in English. This time, too, the police forbade its repetition. The troupe next arranged to hold on the 1st March, a performance of *Surendra-vinodini* along with the above farce under a queer name *Police of Pig and Sheep*, criticising the spirit of Sir Stuart Hogg, Commissioner of Police, and Mr. Lamb, Superintendent of Police, for having taken up a hostile attitude. The joint attraction for a railway train on the stage and the Director's speech in English 'on actresses', as well as the farce in a new name, drew a very crowded house at that night.

* Correspondence of G. C. De in *Indian Mirror*, Feb. 27, 1876.

The various poems of the topic, composed on the period, the farce staged at the Great National under different names and the stirring speeches of Mr. U. N. Das made the city too hot for Jagadananda Babu and after the third performance was advertised, Government finding that the police has been calumniated, came to his rescue, in right earnest and set its machinery in force in favour of the prince's distinguished host. On the representation of the Government of Bengal, His Excellency Lord Northbrooke, the Viceroy, issued an Ordinance from Simla as an emergency measure under the Government of India Act, with a view to give the Government of Bengal power to control the dramatic performances. This was to remain in force for two months till the end of May, until a new law was passed by the Viceregal (Supreme) Legislative Council, on the subject. Armed with this authority Mr. Lambert, Deputy Commissioner and Mr. Lamb, Superintendent of Police with Babu Amrita Lal Dutt, Inspector, Shampukur Thana, came to the Great National Theatre on the 1st March, 1876, when the performance was going on and in absence of the honorary director Mr. Upendra Nath Das, handed over the order to Babu Amritalal Bose, the manager, asking the authorities not to play the farce *Gajadananda*, *Hanuman-charitra* or *Police of Pig and Sheep*, in the night and similar other farces that were

libellous and obscene, any more on their stage, on pain of penalty under the Ordinance. It is not possible to get at the farces anywhere at this moment, as the first one was in manuscript and the last two extempore, but for the information of our readers, we quote a few lines from the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*,* about this repressive Ordinance of the time :

"The story is soon told. The National Theatrical Company entertained crowded house with the farce of *Gajadananda and the Prince*. A cry was raised by the friends of Jagadananda that the piece was obscene and disloyal. We did not see it before, but we have seen it since and consider it only a harmless piece enough. However painful it may be to the feelings of Babu Jagadananda and his friends to be thus caricatured, the farce was neither disloyal nor obscene.

"Viceroy gives Lieutenant Governor an Ordinance, but will the Police be judges ? The next move of Lord Northbrooke is to suppress objectionable theatrical performances by force."

The Ordinance alarmed the people very much and the *Hindu Patriot*, too, with its conciliatory policy advised a milder course by saying that when the Anglo-Indian community was very much surprised over the feelings of the Hindus in the matter of Royal visit to Jagadananda Babu's house and when a charge

*1st March, 1876.

of criminal offence might not end in conviction up to the High Court and which might necessitate the presence of the Royal Highness and his suite, which would make him unnecessarily unpopular and that of the Hindu ladies, who assembled to receive him, Government could have shortened the matter by writing a letter to the Director.*

The Hon'ble Mr. Hobhouse, the Law Member, Government of India, while presenting the Dramatic Performances Bill for further legislation in the Supreme Legislative Council on the 15th March, 1876, sought this to be the main ground for putting it on the legislative anvil. He put his case thus :

“A respectable Hindu gentleman holding a good position in society, one of the legal advisors of the Government and a member of the Legislative Council of Bengal gave an entertainment at his house, which some of the caste-fellows disapproved. In order to punish him, they got up a *play* in which this gentleman, though he had done nothing but what was perfectly lawful, perfectly innocent, perfectly honourable, was represented as deliberately selling the honour of himself and his family, in order to get promotion and money.

“It was this case, which induced H. E. the Viceroy to issue an Ordinance for the purpose of giving the Government of Bengal, power to

* *Hindu Patriot*, March, 16, 1876.

control *dramatic performance* and the bill, which was framed on the model of this Ordinance I am seeking leave to introduce.”*

III. OTHER DRAMAS

Mr. Hobhouse also mentioned another drama in five acts, *Cha-kar-darpan Natak*, a mirror of tea-planters, by Babu Dakshina Chatterjee, where a tea-planter, Mr. Maclean by name, treated two ryots Sarada and Barada, recently recruited as coolies, with harshness and cruelty and tried to outrage the modesty of Surama, Barada's wife, in his private apartment. It is a prototype of *Niladarpana Natak* † and Sarada and Barada are imitations of Nabinmadhab and Bindumadhab, Nritykali and Surama those of Sairindhri and Saralata, and Mr. Maclean as Mr. Rogue, Keshab Chakravarty as Gopi Dewan, Madhab as Sadhu, and Nidhu more as Padi Mayrani. The drama ends in a tragedy and Nritya Kali (Sarada's wife) cries in the last scene—“My husband and his brother have been banished to a distant land ; at length my virtue will be destroyed. I will never let that happen. None has power to do so.” She then seizes the *banti* a crooked knife to cut fish—lying opposite her, strikes her neck with it, and falls.

* *Vide*, page 93.

† *Englishman* 16th, March, 1876

This drama was not staged and of this Mr. Hobhouse spoke in the Council rather strongly:

"In the course of the last year a work was printed and published in the form of a drama entitled *Cha-kardarpan Natak* which he might state, meant the mirror of tea-planters. He did not know, who the author was and what his motives were, but the work itself was as outrageous a calumny as could possibly be conceived. Its object was to hold up as monsters of iniquity the class of tea-planters and all persons engaged in promoting emigration to the tea-planting districts that was to say, men as respectable as any other body of men in the empire. These gentlemen, who carried on their business with great advantage to all concerned and possibly with a greater portion of advantage to the labourers, they employed than to any one else, had held up to them what was called a mirror in which they were represented as indulging, by way of their ordinary occupation, the basest of passions—cruelty, avarice and lust. The play was, however, not acted but there it was. Written for the stage and adapted for it in every respect and without any preventive power the Government had, it might be acted at any moment."*

* *Englishman*, 16th March, 1876 says :

"The book was published last January from *Sama-char Chandrika Press*.. No book is available now but a synopsis has been given in the *Englishman*. 15th May, 1876.

Regarding this drama, which was not staged the *Hindu Patriot* very reasonably said that the Government did not step in to suppress *Niladarpana*, whose copy it is, but those, who felt aggrieved thereby, sought for redress in the court and similarly if the tea-planters were to oppose it, court was open to them, as where ordinary law provides, no special power is necessary. *

IV SUKUMARI'S MARRIAGE.

Nor did the Government lack support. The so called educated people of the puritanic section of the community by their views and writings at the time, were also giving moral support to authorities describing *the stage* in general as a place of obscenity, which, ought, in their opinion, to be stopped. Some interesting events also happened at the time and we shall quote below a few lines coming from a correspondent of the *Indian Daily News* of 17th March, 1876 :

“Satisfaction will not be fully realised so long as the walls of the pavillion of this infamous company were not levelled to the ground, its furniture confiscated and sold under the hammers of the state. That this theatre by the introduction of the harlots on the stage became the hot bed of immorality and corruption none

* H. P. 16th March, 1876.

can deny—some have gone to the length of saying that “Mirror” has been alienating the sympathy of the Hindus by making ungenerous remarks on the taintless character of the distinguished personages and adorable women of the theatre, who, like Orpheus, burnt with public zeal, were not ashamed even to effect prostitute marriage amongst them.”

MARRIAGES IN THE STAGE.

These observations whatever their worth may be, coming from an exclusive section of the community, are referring obviously to the marriage of the celebrated actress Golap-sundari of the Great National, who had come there from “the Bengal Theatre”, some time towards the end of 1874. Babu Upendra Nath Das, a son of late Babu Srinath Das, senior vakil, High Court, was the honorary director here and his *Sarat-Sarojini* was staged for the first time on January 2nd, 1875. The role of Sukumari was played by Golap and so beautifully and artistically she used to do it that though a new comer, she was more recognised as Sukumari in the theatrical company at first and gradually amongst the public at large. Now, Babu Upendra Nath Das was something of a social reformer. To improve the moral condition of actresses he wanted to introduce their marriages and arranged the marriage of Sukumari (Golap) on the 16th February, 1875 under Act III of 1872

with a handsome young man—master Gostha Bihari Dutt under much obligation to him and belonging to the Subarna-Banik caste, with parents alive and who used to act the part of the scientific man in the same drama. Though a digression, it may be said of the star-actress and an excellent singer that her married life was happy at the beginning and others used to caricature her ;

Āmi sakher nāri Sukumari
 Āmarā stri-puruse act kari
 Duniār lok dekhe jāri.

It would, however, not have been so short lived, had not the irresolute young man Gostha Bihari left his wife and baby without any knowledge on their part and started as a ship-boy (khalasi) for England to find out his patron Upendra Babu, who had already gone there about the middle of April, 1876. He was not heard of since, and Mrs. Sukumari Dutt, reduced to extreme poverty, was next, when all other honest means failed (she started first a coaching akhra, then wrote a drama *Apurva Sati*), forced by circumstances to resume her old profession as an actress. She was, however, so very particular about her daughter's education and healthy training that she placed her under the care and supervision of the late Babu Devi Prasanna Roy Ckowdhury, editor *Navya Bharat* whereby getting a decent education the latter too was married to a young

man under the Civil Marriage Act (Act III of 1872),

To come to our point, the marriage of Sukumari was highly disliked by the Brahmos, but the credit of the first and healthy reform amongst the actresses, was all due to Upendra Babu.

V. SURENDRA-BINODINI PROSECUTION.

The drama *Surendra-binodini* was, too, from the pen of Upendra Babu and like the first was successful on the stage. This was first acted on the stage of the Bengal Theatre by "the Great National Opera Company and New Bengal Theatrical" under the name of "New Aryan" on Aug 14, 1875, which, got now the exclusive right to stage the play but as the troupe was dispersed during X'mas of the year, it next came to be staged by the Great National under the author's direct supervision from 31st December, 1875. But though no notice was taken before at the Bengal Theatre, it became the subject of prosecution, when it was acted on the 1st March, 1876, at the Great National, the same night Mr. Lamb and his associates communicated the order under the Ordinance. The reason was that at that night the word "Pig and Sheep" was uttered by Mr. Amritlal Bose, when appearing as Magistrate Mr. Crimble, he addressed, "I am not a tiger, I

am not a bear," and further added "I am not a pig, and not a sheep." It was as we said before, the same night, when the farces of *Pig and Sheep* and *Hanuman Charitra* were stopped under the Ordinance. But the subject of the present prosecution was not that the text had been departed from the original but that the drama was obscene. There was another scene in the drama in which the same European Magistrate Mr. Mc. Crimble made an attempt of criminal assault on the maid Biraj-mohini a grown up girl, who jumped down from the balcony to avoid the outrage. Mr. Bose as Magistrate used to come downstairs and in the next scene, carried the girl in his arms and concluded by saying, "By Joe ! the sweet lady ! she had actually jumped down from the balcony !" Her figure at the time with her clothes, stained with blood, gave the police a handle for prosecution. Mr. Robertson of the River Police had been to the theatre in plain clothes and reported strongly "on the drama being libellous and obscene, tending to show that the blood was the result of outrage of the girl by the European Magistrate, whom it tended to show as monster. Besides, the idea was that as the girl was not married, no Hindu would ever marry her but a fallen one."

Prosecution was ordered on the above report and warrants of arrest were issued against Babus Bhuban Mohan Neogi (proprietor), Upendra Nath Das (Director), Amritalal Bose (Manager),

Matilal Sur, Mahendra Lal Bose, Amritalal Mukherjee (Bel Babu) Sib Nath Chatterjee and Gopal Chandra Das (actors), Ramataram Sanyal, opera master and Banku Bihari Das the business manager. All these gentlemen were arrested in the theatre premises on the 4th March, when *Sati ki kalankini* was being actually staged. Proprietor Neogi was not found but surrendered next day in the court. There was a great stir, actresses began to weep and spectators disappeared. The above gentlemen were sent up for trial on the 5th March, 1876, to the Court of Mr. Dickens, Northern Presidency Magistrate on the allegations that they wilfully exhibited obscene representations and recited obscene words in public place, viz. the theatre, to the annoyance of others under section 292 and 294 of the Indian Penal Code. The whole public of Calcutta was shocked at the prosecution and the general opinion highly disapproved of it.

Indeed, the play, as a whole, was not more improper than many of the operas, which were performed on the English stage and many of the plays performed at Covent Garden and Drury Lane theatres. A large number of gentlemen, both of lead and light, expressed their opinion in favour of the play and various gentlemen gave evidence for the defence. Babus Shyama Charan Sarkar, late Chief Translator to the High Court, Pandit Jogendra Nath Vidyabhusan, editor, *Arya*

Darshan, Pandit Mahesh Chandra Nyayaratna and Mr. Owen, chief Interpreter of the Calcutta High Court, expressed that the book was not obscene. The Education Gazette considered it highly instructive. The Calcutta Gazette stated that the book inculcated moral lessons. Dr. Rajendra Lal Mitra (afterwards Rajah) gave his opinion on a reference to the scenes in Elliot's 'Adam Bede and Mill on the Floss' that the book was devoid of any obscenity. Babus Dwijendra Nath Tagore and Dwarka Nath Ganguly, two leading men of the time, said that the book tended to reform society and that there was nothing obscene, and last, though not the least, Rev. Dr. K. M. Banerjee from Ballygunge, wrote on the 11th March, 1876 :

"It is a work which indicated a good deal of genius in the author and judging it only as a book without having seen its representation on the stage, I am bound to say, I have not detected any passage, whether obscene in itself or likely to suggest obscene ideas to the reader's mind."

"It is not a book that I could recommend for the perusal of boys and girls but that is all I can say against it and from a moral point of view, I could say as much against some of the novels of Sir Walter Scott himself."

"The scene between the Magistrate and maid Birajmobini appeared to be an imitation of the scene between the Knight Templar and the Jewish maid; only the Bengali author makes

the girl actually jump down and then be brought upstairs again, bleeding from the wounds she received by the fall.”*

Mr. Dickens, the trying Magistrate, however, considered the play to be obscene and sentenced only Upendra Babu and Amritlal on the 8th March, 1876, each to suffer one month's simple imprisonment, discharging the rest of the accused. Both the gentlemen received the *fiat* of the court with dignified calmness, which acquires strength from the consciousness of perfect innocence and without a tear, without uttering a word in the form of penitence and without being in the least dissipated, submitted to the court's order. The court room was densely crowded throughout the proceedings, so much so as to call for the frequent interference of the Police.

Srijut Ganesh Chandra Chunder, the well-known solicitor and vakil, instructed by whom appeared Messrs. Robert Allen and Wood, Barristers before the Magistrate, considered the above prosecution unjust and had both of the above two gentleman released on bail from the Criminal Bench of the Honourable High Court, presided over by Mr. Justice Phear and Markby.

Mr. W. C. Bonerjee, Bar-at-law moved the petition for bail before their Lordships.

**Hindu Patriot*, 27th March, 1876.

Sympathy with actors was so deep and universal that a proposal for presenting a memorial to His Honour the Lieutenant Governor for the liberation of the prisoners was seriously discussed on the 9th March, 1876 at Vakils' library, High Court, should Mr. Justice Phear refuse to interfere in the matter. It was generally feared that the immediate result of the conviction would be total suppression of *the National Theatre*, for there was then scarcely any Bengali play, which, in point of decency, surpassed and very few, which even equalled the one that had been made the subject of criminal prosecution.

For the expenses of the appeal, a benefit performance of *Sarojini* was organised on the 11th March, 1876 with an appeal to the public—

“Patrons and countrymen, now or never is the opportunity to help us”. It must be said to the credit of the public that our countrymen heartily responded to the call. The above was the first prosecution of its kind in Calcutta, after Rev. Mr. J. Long, and may even be called the first public prosecution, as Mr. Long was prosecuted by a private individual and there was nothing like arrest, custody and searches by police

The *Bangbasi* prosecution was only subsequent to this in 1891.

During the hearing of the appeal, Messrs. Branson, Palit and Mnoumohan Ghosh argued

the same and vindicated the passages of the drama with reference to departure from context in the best way they could, quoting from Tennyson and other poets. On the 20th March, 1876, Justices Phear and Markby acquitted both the prisoners on a reference to *Regina vs. Stevens*, 5 Earles Reports, page 258, holding that the charge against the prisoners was not specific and that the findings of fact arrived at by the magistrate were not justified by the evidence recorded at the trial.

Vide. I. L. R. I, Cal. 356.

They were thus found innocent of the charges. A synopsis of the trial is given below

THEATRE CASE TRIAL.

Charges were ;

1. Both Babus Upendra Nath Das and Amiritlal Bose Director and Manager on March 1, 1876, at Great National Theatre wilfully exhibited to public view an obscene representation of a woman having her *saree* stained with blood in front, carried in the arms of a man having his shirt stained with blood in front, intending thereby to represent the immediate results of such woman having been deflowered by such man.
2. Babu Amrita Lal Bose as District Magistrate recited and uttered the following obscene words to the annoyance of others :

- (i) Have you got a handsome sister ?
Send her to my bed one day. I consent to give you some money.
- (ii) Beauty (Sundari), I can't wait any longer. I am still addressing you in soft words. Consent to bestow your love ; if you don't consent, I will take it against your will.
- (iii) Sundari, come to my embrace. I am not a tiger or a bear or a hog. I want to taste your love.

Amongst others, following experts were examined:

1. John Charles Owen—I am senior Interpreter, High Court—I see *Surendravadinini*. I have read the book. I find, it resembles a novel, called *Twenty Straws*, published in "Bow Bells." It is a play. It is not in my opinion an obscene play for the Bengali Stage.
2. Shyama Charan Sarkar—I am skilled in Bengali language and I am a Bengali author. I have read this play (reads a passage from page 44). I do not see anything obscene in the words. The best poem in the Bengali language is the most immoral. It is worse than this (reads a passage from another page). There are worse plays than this by many degrees. The magistrate's conduct is reprehensible. Dramatically speaking the words are not obscene.

Mr. Allan—Counsel for the defence ;

It had been played before and no objection had been raised to it. The play as a whole was not more improper than many of the Operas which were performed on the English

Hindu Patriot regretfully observed that "it did not behove the position of the Government, all powerful as it is, to exercise the giant power it possesses as a giant".†

Nothing, however, could save the passing of the two Bills. It is, however, very striking that soon after the judgment was passed, Mr. Justice Phear left India for good on the 30th March, 1876. Rumour ran afloat that he was forced to tender resignation in place of three month's leave as previously arranged. But whether he went on leave or after resignation and whether it was voluntary or forced as a result of pressure put upon him by Lord North-Brooke's Government, we need not pause to ponder. This much, however, is certain that he won the hearts of the people and before he left, Lady Phear was accorded an address by ladies of the Hindu Mahila School at the house of Late Babu Durgamohon Das a staunch Brahmo (father of late Mr. S. R. Das, Law Member, Government of India and of Mr. Justice J. R. Das of Rangoon High Court and uncle of the late Deshabandhu C. R. Das).*

THE DRAMATIC PERFORMANCES CONTROL BILL

The anticipated failure of the above prosecution seems to be the real cause of forcing the

† *Hindu Patriot*. 27th March. 1876.

Bill into the Dramatic Performances Act and it is a very curious coincidence that on the very day Mr. Justice Phear's judgment was delivered (20th March, 1876), Mr. Hobbhouse, the Law Member moved the Bill at the Legislative Council of which we said before.

The Dramatic Performances' Control Bill ran thus :

"That whenever the Government was of opinion that any dramatic performance was scandalous or defamatory or likely to excite feelings of dissatisfaction towards the Government or likely to cause pain to any private party in its performance, or was otherwise prejudicial to the interest of the public, Government might prohibit such a performance".

Section 7 further provides—

"If any Magistrate has reason to believe that any house, room or place is used or is about to be used for any performance prohibited under the Act, he may by warrant authorise any officer of Police to enter with such assistance as may be requisite by night or by day and by force if necessary to enter any such house, room or place and to take into custody all persons whom he finds there *for the said purpose*"

After the presentation of the Bill for consideration, protest meetings were held in various places and the press also took up the cause but nothing, however, as often is the case, prevailed.

After the Bill was presented in the house and members of the Council considered the Bill, it was placed before a select committee consisting of the members :— Mr. Cockrel, Raja Narendra Krishna Deb Bahadur, Sir Alexander Arbuthnot and Mr. Hobbhouse. They agreed unanimously that the Bill should be passed *

* *India Gazette* 25. 3. 1876 pp 346

It was next placed before the Legislative Council for final debates and then passed into the Dramatic Performances Act of 1876.

To us it appears that there was no justification of the bill as the general law of the Penal Code was sufficient for all practical purposes. Mr. Hobbhouse's stock argument, 'prevention was worth all the punishment and it would be a poor satisfaction to punish offenders after the mischief is done,' laboured under the great fallacy, as seditious articles or speeches are never censored before they are delivered, and the mischief, if any, is only punished after it is done. The same should have been the case with performances also. Similarly, a gentleman might be held to scorn and hatred of the public by some rabid article in a newspaper and would the Legislature give protection to him by establishing a censor of the press or would leave him to seek redress in a court of justice ? As for obscenity, opinions will always differ and it is not at all fair to leave it to the executive authorities to pronounce what is and what is not obscene. Now, for instance, in the National Theatre Case, the Executive authorities pronounced the drama *Surenbravinodini* as obscene but the High Court upon the evidence of experts found it to be devoid of obscenity. The obnoxious Bill, therefore, took away from the constituted courts of justice the power of giving a judicial decision upon the character of a drama and has thus vested the sole authority in the executive officers. The principle underlying the Bill was, therefore, open to serious objection.

Then as to the details, the Bill does not include private entertainments and refers only to the performances held in a public place, that

is, "any building or enclosure to which the public are admitted to witness a performance on payment of money." Further, Yatras, like performances and religious observances are exempted from the operation of the Act. But a conviction or discharge under this Act does not bar a prosecution under section 124A (sedition) or section 294 of the Indian Penal Code.

Coercive measures are neither necessary nor calculated to foster any cordial feeling. Sir Richard Temple, the then Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, however, expressed thankfulness at moral support, received from Raja Narendra Krishna Deb* but nothing succeeded to dissuade him from his move inspite of protests from the Bar and although Mr. W. C. Bonerjee made a strong case on behalf of the Theatrical Companies. The Bill received the assent of the Governor General of India, Lord Lytton, who had recently arrived in India, on the 16th December, 1876 and was thus passed into law.

Babu Dharmadas Sur in his autobiographical account gives also a history and the Patrika voiced the feelings of the people,—“It so much curtailed the liberty of the people.”

And it wrote in despair—

“That we are practically lifeless under the burden of the administrators and if Government continue to rule by the enforcement of such laws, we shall have to seek a region where the frowns of the present administration will simply fall on our deaf ears.”*

The Act extended to the whole of India and by the powers it conferred on the Local Governments, it can stop the performance and suppress or forfeit any drama, which, in its

* *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 14th December, 1876.

opinion, may be considered seditious, obscene or defamatory. Seeking to render the growth of dramatic literature healthy and sound, it has curbed the national spirit and checked progress and the further development the national dramatic literature was growing into and promised. Since then there have grown no national dramas and the best of some historical pieces have been put under ban, which has still not been withdrawn.

It will be interesting to our readers to learn that within the next three months, The Vernacular Press Act was also passed into law by the same Government by Lord Lytton on the 16th November, 1877. Thus, both the press and the stage were gagged, as both have the tendency to spread a spirit of love of liberty amongst the people. The ban on the press was soon, however, removed by the Government of Lord Ripon, but the Dramatic Performances Act for the last 70 years has been hanging like a Damocle's sword over the stage.

The year 1876 also marked the close of the English Stage in Calcutta. Mrs. Lewis, before leaving the shores of India, is said to have remarked, that owing to the disgraceful conduct of some members of her troupe, she was compelled to dissolve it and the losses she suffered might be esstimated at Rs. 20,000/-.

Henceforth, the Bengali Stage declined to its worst condition. Demoralisation set in, Bhuvan mohan was turned penniless and no new drama was produced ; and had not Girish Chandra the great revivalist and the Father of the Bengali Stage come into the field with all his might, we would no more have heard of the Bengali Stage and Drama in Bengal ; but of that in the next volume.

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Chapter I
NATIONAL THEATRE 1877-1883.

[Indian Stage Vol III]

After the Dramatic Performances Act was passed, National Theatre was practically closed. Girish Chandra Ghose who had been helping the Theatre from behind, came now to the actual scene and took lease of the Theatre in the name of his brother-in-law. He got the help of two principal artists—Amritalal Mitra and Binodini Dasi who became his chief disciples. Ramtaran Sanyal, dance-master, Khsethramoni Devi and the three lal's—Mohendralal Bose, Matilal Sur and Amritalal Mukherjee also joined him. 'Agamani' (advent of Mother Durga) and 'Akabodhan' both of Girish were put on the staged, on Oct. 6, 1877 and Girish Chandra then staged Madhusudan Dutta's Meghnadbadh, Nabin Chandra Sen's Palasir-juddha and Bankim Chandra's Bishbriksha, himself appearing in the dual roles of Meghnad & Ram in the first piece, Clive in the second and Nagendra nath in the Third . Representation by him was wonderful and the great literary master Akshoy Sarkar in "Sadharani" observed :

".....the representation was so marvellous that we cannot conceive that any Garrick can show greater skill than Girish of Bengal"—About Clive it said "Clive's recitation and delivery were the best. He is also expert in timely postures and movements. His Nagendranath in Bishbriksha was also a masterpiece."

Owing, however, to an accident causing fracture in his left elbow he could not attend and the theatre was broken up. His method of training artists was also admirable. The Theatre again closed its doors, actors left for personal affairs and some to show a few performances in mufasil

In 1880, Pratap Jahuri, a man who meant business took lease of the National Theatre and wanted Girish Chandra to join him as Manager with a permanent service. The latter was getting a salary of Rs. 150/- as Book keeper in Parker Company but Jahuri would not give him more then Rs. 100/- a month and still would have him at there by any means. Girish pondered, Parker dissuaded but the call of "Ranganatha" became paramount.

1881. 1st January—Hamir by Surendra nath Mazumdar, author of 'Mahila Kabya' was staged with Girish in the name role, Mahendra Bose as Uday-bhat, Amrita Mitra as Kakaji and Binodini as Lila.

After performance of Girish Chandra's 'Maya Taru' and "Mohini Pratima" idea being taken from Gilbert's 'Pygmalion and Galatea' he found no drama coming from outside. He then set his own pen to write dramas and brought out a piece "Ananda Raho". It did not however meet with recognition. He then set out to write Mythological (Pouranik) dramas and the following dramas were most highly appreciated and theatre became crowded to suffocation. :—

1881 - Aug. 4-Rabanbadh.

Sept. 17-Sitar Banabash.

Nov. 26-Abnimonyoobadh.

Dec. 31-Laksmanbarjan.

1882 - March 11-Sitarbibaha.

April 15-Ramer Banabash.

July. 22.-Sita Haran.

1883 - Feb. 3, -Pandaber Ajnatabash.

In the above pieces a new style in blank verse was introduced distinct from Madhusudan's blank verse and Mahharsi's eldest son Dwijendra nath Tagore in "Bharati" said-"Here is the real blank verse we get".

But with all business tact, Jahuri was none but a profiteer and for a few days of absence, pay of the artists including even that of Binodini, the heroine of the play was deducted. Girish's advice did not bear any fruit and he left with party.

Kedar Choudhury became the Manager and Anandamath and a few pieces were staged. His 'Chhatrabhanga' was the last in the National.

Chapter II

Star Theatre (at Beadon Street)

Gurmukh Roy, a rich youngman of the Sikh community used to come to Girish Chandra now and again and the latter got the Star Theatre built at Beadon Street at Roy's expense. The house is no more in existence, the Chittaranjan Avenue passing through it.

The first drama staged on 21st July 1883 was Girish Chandra's 'Daksha Yajna.' All the roles were ably acted, specially that of Girish as Daksha, Amrita Mitra as Mahadeva and Binodini as Sati. Nala-Damayanti was next staged on Dec. 15, 1883 with Amrita Mitra as Nala, Amrita Bose as Vidusaka, Aghore Patnak as Kali.

After this, Gurmukh Roy left Theatre of his own accord, selling the house at Rs. 11000/- Girish Chandra's disciples Amrita Mitra, Amrita Bose, Hariprasad Bose and Dasu Neogi became the proprietors, but though at the head he did not like to have any proprietary right.

Girish finding the excellent actor Amrita Mitra as a fitting substitute for his roles, assigned henceforth all those to Mitter. He remained busy with making dramas.

After his pieces Brishaketu and Sribatsha-Chinta and Amrita Bose's "Bibaha Bibhrat" were staged, Chaitanya Lila religious drama was next put on boards. This created a sensation and with Kirtans spectators also used to sing in unison with the artists of the theatre.

The theme was a highly devotional one and its praise spread to all parts of Bengal. Ramkrishna Deb, that world-renowned saint came to see a performance and blessed all specially Binodini in the role of the hero. All papers were deep in praise and Col. Olcott, president of the Theosophical Society of India, wrote in praise of her "on the scenes she throws herself into the role so ardently that one only sees the Vaishnava saint before him". After this, Girish

Chandra came under the complete influence of Ramkrishna and became his devout disciple. Girish remained at the Theatre at the command of Ramkrishna Deb for the training of people.

Pralhad charitra was staged on Nov. 22, 1884, with Amrita Mitra as Hiranya Kasipu. Amrita Lal Bose's "Bibaha Bibhrat" was very successful Khetromoni's jhee was specially interesting and the Viceroy Lord Dufferin and his worthy consort highly praised her representation.

In 1885, Chaitanya Lila Part II was staged and the next worthy piece was Budhwa Deb's life taken from Edwin Arnold's "Light of Asia". The play was very successful with Amrita Mitra as Budhwa and Binodini as Gopa who acquitted themselves in a highly creditable manner. "Hindu Patriot" of Dec. 14, 1885 observed "Babu Girish Chandra Ghose has deserved well of his co-religionists and his countrymen by his endeavours to improve the moral tone of our stage to popularise Hindu religion and to develop the slender literary and dramatic resources of the country" Edwin Arnold also highly praised the performance. He witnessed it.

The next drama staged on June 12, 1886 was Bilwamangal a highly devotional piece. It speaks of God as one, the various sects worshipping Kali, Durga, Shiva &, worship only God who is but One. Amrita Mitra in the main role, Binodini as Chintamani, Bel Babu as Sadhok. Aghore Pathak as Bhikshuk, Gangamoni as Pagalini and Khsetromoni as Thako were marvellous. Girish's "Belliokbazar" with Amrita Bose as Dukari sen was highly entertaining.

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Chandra came under the complete influence of Ramkrishna and became his devout disciple. Girish remained at the Theatre at the command of Ramkrishna Deb for the training of people.

Pralhad charitra was staged on Nov. 22, 1884, with Amrita Mitra as Hiranya Kasipu. Amrita Lal Bose's "Bibaha Bibhrat" was very successful Khetromoni's jhee was specially interesting and the Viceroy Lord Dufferin and his worthy consort highly praised her representation.

In 1885, Chaitanya Lila Part II was staged and the next worthy piece was Budhwa Deb's life taken from Edwin Arnold's "Light of Asia". The play was very successful with Amrita Mitra as Budhwa and Binodini as Gopa who acquitted themselves in a highly creditable manner. "Hindu Patriot" of Dec. 14, 1885 observed "Babu Girish Chandra Ghose has deserved well of his co-religionists and his countrymen by his endeavours to improve the moral tone of our stage to popularise Hindu religion and to develop the slender literary and dramatic resources of the country" Edwin Arnold also highly praised the performance. He witnessed it.

The next drama staged on June 12, 1886 was Bilwamangal a highly devotional piece. It speaks of God as one, the various sects worshipping Kali, Durga, Shiva &, worship only God who is but One. Amrita Mitra in the main role, Binodini as Chintamani, Bel Babu as Sadhok. Aghore Pathak as Bhikshuk, Gangamoni as Pagalini and Khsetromoni as Thako were marvellous. Girish's "Bellickbazar" with Amrita Bose as Dukari sen was highly entertaining.

After "Rup Sanatan" of G. C. was staged, Star Theatre had to leave Beadon Street. Gopal Lal Seal purchased the house and made Girish Chandra manager on a salary of Rs. 300/- with a bonus of Rs. 20000/-. Out of this, he paid Rs. 16,000/- to proprietors of the 'Star'-his disciples. The land at the present site at Cornwallis Street had already been purchased and the house was now built.

National Theatre which Girish had left in 1883 staged "Raja Basanta Roy" on July 3, 1886 and Anandamath was then closed. House was next demolished.

Emerald Theatre opened with Pandava Nirbasana by manager Kedar nath Choudhury. After Girish joined, his drama 'Purna Chandra' (with Sukumari as Purna Chandra) and 'Bishad' were staged on March 17, 1888 and Oct. 5, 1888 respectively. In the second piece one Miss Kusum did so well as Bishad (Sareswati) that she was henceforth called 'Bishad Kusum.' After this Girish left Emerald for Star.

Chapter III

Star (in the Present Site).

The new house at 79/3/4, Cornwallis Street was built only with the sum of Rs. 16,000/- which Girish had given from the sale proceeds of some Mufasil shows. The land had been purchased by money received from Gopal Seal for building the house.

The theatre opened on May 26, 1888 with Girish Chandra Ghose's drama "Nasiram". As Girish was then in the service of Gopal Seal, authorship was kept a secret. An

opening poem composed by Girish was read by Amrita Bose who also appeared in the same role. Ramkrishna Deb was presented in the character of Nasiram.

This was followed by "Sarala" with Bel Babu as Gadadhar, Kiranbala as Sarala, Amrita Mitra Bidhubhuson Nilmadhab Chakravarty as Sashibhuson and Amrita Bose as Nilkamal were marvellous. By this time Gopal Seal transferred the management of Theatre to four persons as lessees. So Girish was no more bound by the contract with Gopal Seal. The company of Seal had also been considered degrading. He left for his "Star".

The Star Theatre got their master now as manager who produced his epoch-making social drama "Prafulla" on 27th April, 1889. The performance was a grand success with Amrita Mitra as Jogesh, Amrita Bose as Ramesh, Bel Babu as Bhajahari, Kiranbala as Jnanada and Bhushan Kumari as Profulla. The "Statesman" of 21st May 1889 and some succeeding issues in the editorial columns "congratulated the talented author and the able manager Girish Chandra Ghose on the very great success they had achieved and recommended the public to see the play and judge for themselves".

"Prafulla" was followed by Haranidhi, another social drama from the pen of Girish Chandra and Aghore by Bel Babu was marvellous.

About this time two very powerful artists—Bel Babu and Kiranbala met with tragic end and "Reis and Rayyet" (18. 3. 90) and (April 30) expressed deep sorrow and highly praised their histrionic talents.

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About this time two very powerful artists—Bel Babu and Kiranbala met with tragic end and "Reis and Rayyet" (18.3.90) and (April 30) expressed deep sorrow and highly praised their histrionic talents.

'Englishman' called the latter a Bengali Siddons and Reis & Rayyet said "Bengali Theatre is a temple of high art."

Girish Chandra's "Chanda" was next staged on June 24, 1890. Mitter appeared as Chanda and Surendra nath Ghose (popularly known as Dani Babu) son of Girish Chandra as Raghu-deb ably supported him.

Girish Chandra's Malinabikas, Mahapuja and Amrita Bose's social drama Tarubala were next staged.

About this time Girish Chandra's second son a child of 4/5 years was then very ill and he had to stay at Madhupur. Absence was not excused by the proprietors who considered themselves now equal to the task for management of Theatre. Girish's services were dispensed with.

As a protest, a large number of artists, male and female, left service. They formed a party "City Theatre" and began to stage dramas in private houses. On an injunction being moved before the Hon'ble High Court that G. C's. dramas meant only for Star Theatre, Mr. Justice Wilson refused it, and wanted the Star authorities to have the matter settled with Girish as in his opinion Girish was the principal man through whose efforts Drama and stage attained such a high status in Bengal.

Eventually Mr. Justice Wilson dismissed the suit with costs as in his opinion 'Copy Right' Act protects no doubt copy-right of books, but not the right to represent plays. Meantime Girish's son died. He then left Calcutta to see the divine mother, Saradamani Devi, his Guru's wife and after full

solace was regained he came and started the Minerva Theatre at 6, Beadon Street (still in existence) at the site of the old National with the pecuniary assistance of Nagendra Nath Mukherjee, grand son of millionaire Prasanna Kumar Tagore.

Chapter IV

Minerva Theatre

Macbeth in Bengali translation of Shakespeare's well-known drama was mounted on Jan. 28, 1893 with Girish Chandra in the name role, Tincori Dasi as Lady Macbeth, Dani Babu as Malcolm and Ardhendu Sekhar Mustafi in five different minor roles. The play was a grand success and the "Friend of India" observed "Performance of Macbeth marks an epoch in the annals of the Native Stage" and Englishman remarked on 8th Feb. 1893.

"A Bengali Thane of Cawdar is a living suggestion of incongruity but the reality is an astonishing reproduction of the standard convention of the English stage". Tincori Dasi with her Siddonlike impressive appearance and resonant metallic voice ably supported the hero.

Girish Chandra's 'Mukul Munjara' was the next drama staged. Abu Hossain (Mushroom Emperor) followed it on 25. 3. 59. Ardhendu Sekhar as Abu was at his best as a consummate actor and Tincori and Ranu Babu as Dai and Masho or captivated the whole house by their charming duets and dancings.

The next piece was Girish Chandra's "Jana" staged on Dec. 23, 1893. Jana incites her son to the battle field, scolds the daughter-in-law for her weak fears and laments her husband's cowardice for submitting to the enemy as a slave. No character like Jana had before this been depicted by any author except Shakespeare's volumnia.

Karamati Bai and some farces were next put on boards when rehearsals for staging "Prafulla" here commenced, with Girish in the main role. Star also repeated this in competition. Play in both the theatres was very successful but Girish in the role of Jagesh was without a parrallel, which has since not been approached by any tragic actor. A powerful critic in Indian Mirror wrote on Aug. 5, 1895—"Mitra has the gift of a clear incisive voice and a roundness of delivery while the latter has the advantage of being the author of the piece (not necessarily an advantage in the case of all the authors) and of being possessed with the intuitive skill of probing into the depths of human thought and giving it feeling expressions. The former voices the thunder while the latter emits the lightening of a gloomy atmosphere of the characters life". The contest reminds one of that between Garick & Barry as King Lear.

"A king, aye. every inch a king,
Such Barry doth appear,
But Garrick's quite another thing
He's every inch King Lear."

There arose some differences with Nagendra Mukherjee and Girish as a self-respecting manager left in March 1896.

Chapter V.

At the Star Theatre (again)

The proprietors of Star specially Amrita Mitra, Girish's first and best disciple invited him and made him Managing Director on an honorarium of Rs. 350/- a month. About this time Raj Krishna Roy dramatist whose Naramedha Jajna, Banabeer had been ably staged, died and a dramatist was also required as there was nothing to succeed Chandra Sekhar which ably dramatised by Amrita Basu was very successful with Amrita Mitra as Chandra Sekhar, Amrita Basu as Lawrence Foster, Tarasundari as Saibalini and Nari Sundari as Daloni Begum.

Girish's Kalapahar was staged on Dec. 26, 1896 with Mitra in the name role. Girish Chandra appeared as Chintamani an exact representation of Ramkrishna Deb, his Gurudeb. Dani Babu's Leto too was very successful.

Mayabashan was staged on 18th Dec. 1897 and Girish as Kali Kinkar, Dani Babu as Haladhar and Nari Dundari as Rangini were true to character.

Chapter VI. Other Theatres.

(1) Beena Theatre.

Soon after Emerald Theatre had been started at the old Star stage, dramatist Raj Krishna Roy opened Beena Theatre at 38 Meachuabazar Street, Calcutta with his drama Chandrahash on Dec. 10, 1887. Special feature of this theatre was that female roles were rendered by male artists. Next week he put on Boards "Pralhad Charitra" which had created a great stir in the Bengal Theatre. Roy himself appeared as Hiranya Kasipu, Akshoy Kali Koer as Shanda and Sarat Karmakar as Pralhad. After performance of some pieces of Roy as Haradhanurbhanga Kumar Bikram Haridas Thakur etc. the theatre was closed.

In Dec. 1888 dramatist and director Upendra Nath Das (U. N. Das) staged Dada O Ami in this stage under the name New National. The Emerald artists caricatured him with a new piece Gadha O Tumi (you and Ass - or U. N. Das). After Sarat Sorojini and Ekadashi were staged, New National was closed. Raj Krishna Roy then gave up his first idea and took females in his theatre. His Meerabai was staged on Aug. 4, 1889 with Akshoy Kali Koer as Rana Kumbha and Tincowrie Dasi as Meerabai.

Laksahira staged in Feb. 1891 was the last piece of this theatre.

II Emerald Theatre - After Girish had left in 1889 for the Star, services of Kedar Choudhury as manager and Monomohon Bose as director were secured. After a few worthless pieces as Rashlila by Monomohon Bose, Shoroja, Bakkeswar end. Ananda Kumar Rabindra Nath's Raja O Rani with Mohendra Bose as Kumar Sen, Vikradeb by Matilal Sur, Ila by Bishad kusum was put on boards. Shanda, Dinabandhu Mitra's Kamale Kamini were next staged. Mohendra Bose then became manager and with him as Nagendra, Purna Ch. Ghose as Debendra, Sukumari Dutta as Surjamukhi Bishbriksa continued for three months from June 1891. This was followed by Kapal Kundala and Krishnakanterwill with Purna Babu as Krishnakanta, Mohendra Bose as Govindalal, Sukumari Dutt as Rohini Blakie (Hari Sundari) as Bhramar.

Mohendra Bose suffered losses as Manager and left with Sukumari in Feb 1894 for Bengal Theatre and Ardhendu Sekhar Mustafi coming from Minerva joined the theatre as Manager. He too could not cope with the situation and ran into heavy debt. Emerald's last manager was Mustafi.

City Theatre.

Nilmadhob Chakraborty who had organised performances of Girish Chandra's dramas continued those on the Beena Stage from 16th May 1891—Although in the beginning of 1893 it had to stop for sometime, renewed his

attempts again from Oct 7, 1893-when again it stopped in March 1894, when another party showed two three performances under the name of Gaity.

Nilmadhob next opened his "City" in Emerald Stage from June 20, 1896. Although not successful at the beginning, he attained a reputation with "Devi Choudhurani," himself taking the role of Bhabani Pathok, Probodh Ghosh as Brojeswar, Golap (younger) as Devi, Chandi Charan De as Haraballav, Gostha Chakraborty as Lt. Brenun and Bishadkusum as Nishi. The representation was true to life, but City's career was cut short in 1897 by the appearance of Amerendra Nath Dutt and his classic Theatre.

III Bengal Theatre

The Bengal Theatre staged in 1879 Chandra Sekhar and Mrinalini with Behari Lal Chatterjee as Chandra Sekhar, Haridas Das as Pratap, Sarat Ch. Ghose as Foster, Bono biharini as Dalani. In Mrinalini Sukumari Dutt was marvellous as Girijaya.

Bengal Theatre obtained a recognition which even Girish's Theatre did not. Lord Lytton Viceroy of India accompanied by Lady Lytton and Lieutenant Governor Sir Richard Temple visited the Theatre and witnessed the play of Sakuntala or Last Ring in June 18, 1878.

Jyotirindra nath's 'Asrumati' was staged in 1880-Rajkrishna's Pralhad Charitra created a sensation and in 1891 Bengal Theatre acquired the dignified title "Royal

Bengal by presenting a few scenes from *Sakuntala* to His Royal Highness Prince Albert Victor, the then Prince of Wales - In 1894 Mohendra Bose came from Emerald with Mrs. Sukumari Dutt and the following pieces—*Mrinalini*, *Durgesnandini*, *Puru Bikram* and *Bishbriksha* were done to a success. In 1895 (Feb, 2) Bankim Chandra's *Rajani* dramatised by Bihari Lal Chatterjee was put on boards with Mahendra Bose as *Sachindra*, Haridas Das as *Amarneth*, Nistarini as *Labangalata*. Sukumari as *Rajani* wonderfully succeeded in imitating the visionless eyes of the blind girl. In 1895 (August) Mohendra Bose left for *Minerva* and some other artists also left.

In 1897 Bengal had to compete with *Nilmadhob's* City on Emerald stage (in the same neighbourhood) *Krishnakanterwill* was successfully staged and after the performance of *Darafkhan* and *Promode Ranjan*, Kumar, *Prativa* and *Nihar* (on 16.3.1901) by death of Behari Lal Chatterjee (24.4.01) the life and soul of Bengal Theatre, its doors were permanently closed. Behari lal was highly praised by Girish Chandra in an article.

Chapter—VII.

Theatre at Gujrat

Parijat Manjuri Nataka had been preserved on a slab of black stone at Ahmedabad. It was the work of a Bengali, Gangadhar Banerjee by name. Of the Sanskrit

dramatists in Gujrat, Ram Chandra (1093-1174) wrote 'Nalabilas' & 'Natya darpana' and other pieces. His motto was that actor must always think. after that was heard the name of a versatile writer Premananda (1636-1734) who brought out 'Rasadarshika,' 'Satyabhama,' 'Panchali Prasanna Akshyan' drama in Gujrati.

In Gujrat there was no stage and episodes mostly from Krishna's life were generally taken and crudely staged in melas (fairs, or in Vaishnava temples under the name of Rashlila. A large number of Garabi songs and dances were also used - In course of time a Katha Samaj was formed and Ranchhodbhai Udayram, a leader of the same (1838-1923) first translated some Sanskrit pieces and after some time wrote Jayakumar and mythological drama Harish Chandra and the social tragedy Lalita Dukshaharana Darshaka Nataka. The last drama was staged by Parsi Theatrical Companies in Bombay which spread his reputation.

The Gujrati Company was started in 1878 and was followed by "the Morbi" and these as professional theatrical Companies began to entertain people. Garabi dance which had declined was added to the shows more artistically.

Dahyabhai Dholshaji (1867-1906) made great improvement on the stage. He founded Deshi Nataka Samaja and staged Asrumati, Udaybhanu, and Vinaveli-which influenced the literature and social life of Gujrat very much.

Amrita Krishna Nayak a player and composer with his Zeri Sappa or the venomous serpent in 1904 took Bombay by storm.

Poet Nanalal —the composer of Garabi songs produced some dramas Indukumara (1909) Jayjayanta (1914) Rajarshi Bharata (1922), Jahangir Nurjahan, Akbar and Shajahan.

Ramanbhai Nilkant's 'Raino Parvat' (1914) is also a good play.

Kanaiyalal Maneklal Munshi, another dramatist of merit, wrote a number of dramas based on mythological and social subjects of which the following deserve mention :

Purandar Parajoy (1922) Abibbaktama (1931), Tarpana, Lopamudra based on Pouranik topic Bekharabi Jana, Kakani Shashi, Brahmacharyasrama based on social subjects.

For about twenty years last female artists have been introduced.

Prof. B. K. Thakore and Chandra Vadan Mehta have written some dramas - Ag Godi (The Iron Road) Naga Bava, the naked Fakirs and Santa Kookdi (Hide and Seek)

Other writers are in expectation and more would come as topic would not be wanting. It is the birth place of Mahatma Gandhi and of a number of patriots.

Chapter VIII.

Marhati Theatre

Theatre has been much improved in Maharashtra. The first Marathi drama was staged at Sangli in the year 1843 "Sita Sayamburam" from the pen of Vishnu Amrit Bhaba. Before this, Hari-katha was the popular and civilised type of recreation. It is akin to Kathakata of Bengal. Lalit, Bahurupi, Dashabatar, Tamasha were other forms of amusement.

The first drama mentioned above had Sutradhar and songs. Bhaba's other dramas were popular at Poona and elsewhere. Next came Uttarrama Charitra (1859), Parvati Parinaya 1872, Mrichhakatic, Sakuntala. Venisanhar in 1881, and Viratparba 1884 of P. Godbole and Mudra Rakshas, Malati Madhava, Vikramorboshi of Krishna Sastri Rajawade Malabikagnimitra of Ganesh Sashtri, Lele and Prasanna Raghava of S. Palande were also staged. English dramas Othello and other pieces were also translated.

The first independent Marathi drama was however Madhao Rao Peshawe of Kirtane produced in 1861. It was well received on the stage and was followed by Jaypal staged by Ichalkaranjkar Natak Mandali. Other dramas followed of which Tara by B. M. Mahajani is worth mentioning. By 1880 stage became a matter of attraction for the public.

About the year 1880 three students of Poona Engineering College—Deval, Patkar and Vamanrao Bhaba floated “Aryodharak Mandali” for staging performances which would help public welfare. Really it was not a commercial concern but ‘Marathi Stage’ a great deal. The above Mandali gave rise to Shahunagarwasi Natak Mandali which ran about 25 years. It staged comedies as also social and historical dramas - of these *Tratika* by Prof. Kelkar became very popular both with the theme and acting.

In 1880 Oct. 31 Anna Saheb Kirloskar’s *Shakuntala* was staged in the *Anandabhava Natak Griha* at Poona.

Kirloskar introduced scientific music on the stage and made other artists sing songs unlike the custom when *Sutradhar* only had to sing. He also introduced other reforms.

Mr. Muzumdar appeared as *Shakuntala* supported by *Morobo Waghulikar* and *Kelhatkar*. His *Subhodra* was another successful drama. Kirloskar was a reformer of the stage but was cut off early in 1885.

Mr. Trilokekar (1835-1908) wrote three dramas *Harish Chandra*, *Damayanti* and *Sangit Sabitri Natak*.

In 1885 Mr. Candy, Principal *Rajnarain College*, *Kolhapur* advertised through papers a prize of Rs. 150/- for a good Marathi Drama. Prizes were won by Mr. Khare for ‘*Gunatkarsa*’ the first and Mr. Dewal for – ‘*Durga*’ the second in 1886. Soon after some theatrical Companies were started and notable amongst others was the *Gandarva*

Natak Mandali started by some of the Ex. actors of Kirloskar Company e. g. Rajhansa (Bal Gandarva) Mr. Tambe, Mr. Bodas and a few others. This company became very popular and the principal actor used to appear always in female roles. Dramas of Kulhatkar, Gadkari and Khadilkar were generally staged. Maharashtra is indebted much to Bal-Gandarva for improvement of the stage. Uptil the year 1890, female roles were mainly taken by male artists.

About dramatists—After Kirloskar, N. C. Kelkar wrote a few dramas, Natyacharya Khadilkar's Manapaman brought fame on him. His Kichakbadh created a sensation. It was suspected that Lord Curzon had been portrayed in metaphor and "Times of India" explained that a weak Government at home represented by Virat gave the Viceroy a free hand and Draupadi is India, Yuidhistir represents the moderate and Bhima the extremist party.

Ram Ganes Gadkari (1885-1919) wrote some social dramas. In his historical drama Rajasannyas (not finished) he advocated 'king must be a trustee of the Kingdom' and can not spend public money for personal enjoyments, "Vir-Savarkar wrote a drama "Sanyast Khady".

Madhao Rao Joshi wrote some dramas of which Sthanik Swarayya gained much popularity. Mama Varerkar wrote also good dramas including "Hach Mulacha Bap" in 1917 criticising the dowry system. His Satteche Gulam shows how rich families become paupers by seeking justice in Law Courts.

Mrs. Girijabai Kelkar wrote realistic drama *Purushanche Band* 1913 and *Ayesha* 1921 – Prof. Phadaka, Mr. Yashawant rao Joshi, Mr. Bhole, Mr. Vartak are other dramatists – There are also many others and drama and stage are in the stage of progress in Maharashtra.

Chapter IX.

Sanskrit Dramas.

In 1889-1899 – *Shapabashan*, *Veni Samhar*, *Mrichkatic*, *Chanda Kousik* and some other dramas were staged.

Shakuntala was staged in 1895 by Professors and students of Harihar Sanskrit College Kotalipara.

Chapter X

Classic Theatre

At the Emerald stage Amarendra Nath Dutta a fairly educated young man coming of a rich and cultured Kayastha family opened the classic theatre in 1897 on April 16 with Girish Chandra's *Nala Damayanti*, and *Bellikbazar Dakshayajna*, *Tarubala* and *Battle of Plassy* followed and *Hariraj* on June 21, 1897 with Amarendra as *Hariraj*, *Tara Sundari* as *Aruna* were staged. Condition of the Bengali Stage was then below normal, Girish was not working anywhere, *Minerva* was on the verge of collapse., 'The Star Theatre' was meant only for good and disciplined spectators and the general feeling was for a change. *Alibaba* of Kshirode Prasad Vidyavinod and revised by

Girish Chandra with new songs introduced, gave much mirth to audience. Discipline was wholly lax. But sales rose up to Rs. 1800/- on a show.

Girishchandra's services were next requisitioned and his Pandava-Gouraba staged on Feb. 17, 1900. A noted critic observed

"As soon as Girish Chandra joined the classic it attained the reputation of being the best theatre in Calcutta. Every night the audience for even this religious drama Pandavagourab was so large that many had to go back disappointed for want of seats."

Girish Chandra's Kanchuki, Mohendra Bose's Bhiswa, Tincori Dasi's Subhadra and Kusumkumari's Urbashi were excellent and Amarendranath in the main role Bhima was highly appreciated. He had a very good and stage fitting appearance and his voice was grave and sonorous.

The next volume IV will give the history of the stage for the 20th century.

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